















A MAN FOR A' THAT

BOOKS BY CHARLES J. FINGER

HIGHWAYMEN

BUSHRANGERS

FRONTIER BALLADS

IN LAWLESS LANDS

ROMANTIC RASCALS

AN OZARK FANTASIA

TALES WORTH TELLING

THE SPREADING STAIN

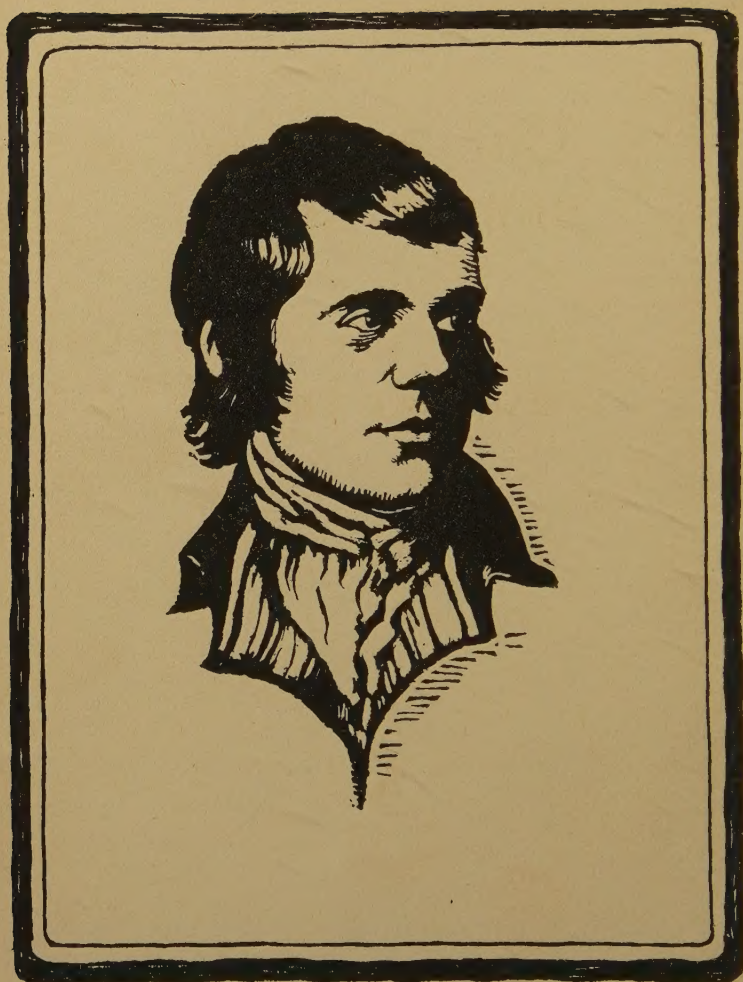
HEROES FROM HAKLUYT

TALES FROM SILVER LANDS

DAVID LIVINGSTONE—EXPLORER AND PROPHET







# A MAN FOR A' THAT

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## *The Story of* ROBERT BURNS

*By*

CHARLES J. FINGER



*Boston, Massachusetts*  
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**WITHDRAWN**

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*To*  
THE MEMORY OF  
WILLIAM MARION REEDY  
AND  
GEORGE STERLING



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## Introduction

NOT so long ago, about the time when apartment houses were encroaching upon that last stronghold of New York's picturesque Charlton street, I sat in the library of my friend's house in that street, and my friend and I talked of literature and of literary gems. The name of Robert Burns coming up, my friend, who is a finely read man, told me that he had read almost nothing of Burns. Trying to find something interesting to read to him, I thought of that picturesque opening to Burns' early effort, "The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie":

As Mailie, an' her lambs thegither,  
Was ae day nibblin' on the tether.  
Upon her clout she coost a hitch,  
An' owre she warsl'd in the ditch;  
There, groaning, dying, she did lie,  
When Hughoc he cam doytin by.

Wi' glowrin een, and lifted han's  
Poor Hughoc like a statue stan's;  
He saw her days were near hand ended.  
But wae's my heart! he could na mend it!

and also of that other stanza because of its homeliness,

Thro' a' the toun she trotted by him;  
A lang half-mile she could descry him;  
Wi' kindly bleat, when she did spy him,  
She ran wi' speed;  
A friend mair faithfu' ne'er cam nigh him.  
Than Mailie dead.

I took down the index of Mosher's Bibelot, as fine a

collection of literary gems as ever man got together. I did not expect to find Mailie in it, because that early poem of Burns has not had the attention or praise that I hold it deserves; but I did hope to discover something. But not a line of Burns was there.

Now had a Scot discovered that omission it would have seemed as strange to him as though, in an anthology of English poetry, there appeared nothing of Milton or of Shakespere. I do not say this without weighing the matter. In saying it I have in mind not only Scots in Scotland, who might be said to have local prejudice and limited horizons, but Scots who have gone out into the world and rubbed against man, the kind of Scots you find in Kipling and in McFee and in so many of those golden tales written by that golden horseman, Cunningham Graham. And if you made a map of the world and colored in a vivid red those parts of it where Scotsmen rule the roost, not ruling it politically but in a sense industrially, you would have a bright belt wherever sheep are raised; a broad mark from Banff in Canada going east and west, then down south across Montana and Wyoming and into Colorado and Texas and New Mexico. South of the equator the Scots' territory would spread along the Argentine down to Tierra del Fuego, with a well-defined patch out in the Falkland Islands. Then you would have Australia and New Zealand marked for the Scot; also the grazing lands of Africa where Livingstone went. There would be lines across oceans, too, because wherever steamers went, there you would find Scotsmen as engineers. But traveling the lands marked thus on the map you would be hard put to it to find a Scot anywhere who could not quote Robert Burns by the page, who could not sing some of his songs, who

could not rattle off one of his epigrams on occasion. You cannot find among the English any such widespread acquaintance with England's poets. Germans do not quote Goethe or Schiller as Rab and Tam and Sandy quote the Ayrshire man. The French have no poet held as close to the heart by all sorts and conditions of men as Burns is held by his countrymen. You will travel far to find Americans quoting Longfellow or Whittier or Whitman or Poe. In fact, as to the last, you would have trouble to find anywhere enough men out of twenty caught at random who could sing, without any interjected throat noises to cover blanks and gaps, so common a song as "Hail, Columbia." But you'll hardly find a Scot of pure blood who cannot repeat "Duncan Gray," and "A Man's a Man," and "Auld Lang Syne," and "John Anderson My Jo," and long passages from the "Saturday Night." So you see why any man born north of the Solway Firth would have resented the omission of Burns from the Bibelot.

The reason for that closeness to the heart in which Burns is kept is his simplicity and uncomplicatedness. He is Everyman's poet. There is no exclusiveness about him. His poems appeal to men for exactly the same reason that those little poems I print on the first page of my own private journal appeal. That is, they are odd fragments, picked up here and there, sometimes written by men and women not professionals, doctors and lawyers and farmers; sometimes clipped from local newspapers; sometimes sent to me by friends with no explanation as to author or origin. But nearly always they are of a sort to make for what I choose to call a rejuvenescence of the golden age. They evoke those pleasing thoughts and imaginings which you and every healthy

child knew before the prison house of conventionality closed about you.

You will not find Robert Burns indulging in speculations about time and space. You will not find him psycho-analyzing himself, or writing poetry about the fashionable insanity of his day, which happened to be phrenology. You will not find him going in for any new style, as people today affect what is called a new style, say the style of Gertrude Stein which is the worst style in the world. He does not drop bottomless buckets into empty wells of speculation. What he does give us is himself, and that self the kind of man that all healthy people enjoy, a man with well-balanced nature and a fund of wholesome laughter, with a good deal of human sympathy, with a love for nature, with courage and amiability.

He is the happy sort that refuses to meddle with the principles of other people and has a hearty and wholesome hatred of any invasion. He does not build up theories, starting from insecure foundations and reaching to incorrect conclusions. He is not afraid of the great emotions of the world, love and sorrow and loss. He made his mistakes, got himself into muddles and climbed out of them, made on occasion a sentimental fool of himself in the case of Clarinda who had all the strange insensitiveness of the deliberately sensitive; he went in for pompous and sonorous writing sometimes, but back he came to sanity and the eager life with an intense desire to enjoy it. Like any of us he was always willing to turn over a new leaf, undeterred by those who insisted upon resurrecting his back numbers.

There is the broad humor of the man, his wholesome laughter. You get it in "Tam O' Shanter," in "The



Jolly Beggars," in "Duncan Gray" and a dozen little poems full of the humor and cranks of love. Nor was he the man to forget the coarser incidents and the rougher aspects and adventures of love. So in that field too, Robert Burns was Everyman, therefore close to us all. And he sang exactly as you or I write a letter, because he wanted to.

. . . an aim I never fash—  
I rhyme for fun.

And when he did not rhyme for fun, or because the spirit moved him, then down dropped his work, as when some urged him to write in English and he made the attempt.

Burns is again Everyman in the strongly personal note that he strikes, and that strongly personal note, you will observe, is exactly the strength of so many of our latter-day minor poets whose work reaches so high a level, Helene Mullins, Marjorie Meeker, Glenn Ward Dresbach, Frederick Niven, Lena W. Blakeney and many more. It is the note that makes the work of those excellent young Irishmen of what brilliant Boyd calls the Irish Renaissance, so fascinating. The man is in his writing for all to know, the good of him and the other, too,—I do not say "bad" because that implies judgment and self-conscious superiority,—and it is worse than folly to adopt any lofty pose seeing Pan in the woods. Yet Burns was Pan come to earth, a creature knowing nothing of spiritual anguish as Bunyan or Andrewes knew such anguish. Burns could never feel that he was being engulfed in billows of sin, as did Bunyan; nor could he call himself as Andrewes did "an unclean worm, a dead dog, a body of death." True, he tried to imagine himself a lost sinner in the deeps of spiritual dejection, but that

was in his extreme youth and under the influence of those who believe it a duty to scare and affright children. His poetic *mea culpas* are too cold and formal for spontaneity. The man's soul was thoroughly healthy and healthy organisms give their owner no concern.

Burns was Everyman, too, in his revolutionary spirit, in his boyish outspokenness, in his resentment when others sought to impose their preferences upon him. He differed in these respects from Everyman in that he could say what others wish to say and burn to say, but do not say either because of inability or of fear. So we have "The Holy Fair," and the savage "Address to the Unco' Guid," and "Death and Doctor Hornbrook," and "Holy Willie's Prayer," and "The Ordination." They grew out of his healthy opposition to invasion.

So as Everyman, an easily articulate Robert Burns sings of everyday sights and scenes and human events. Thus he becomes accessible, the kind of man you would like to meet and to know. He is what old Doctor Johnson called club-able. Like a club-able fellow he can be serious and earnest, but never solemn or pompous. And, because it is one of my happinesses to make good fellows acquainted, I have written this rough sketch to the end that you may come to like the man and his works. And like him you certainly must, except you should be (which the Lord forbid!) one of those who are shocked at lapses from perfection because of your own tremendously high standard.

## PART I

### On Getting Acquainted

AS a boy I sat at the feet of a school teacher who had saturated himself with strange notions, and who seemed to enjoy the parading of them. He contemptuously rejected everything we held to be true. He maintained that a cause could be found to account for everything and that all things having been potential in the primal mist, whoso wished to know the why and wherefore of things needed to do no more than a little tracking back on some intellectual trail, whereafter being so inclined, he might safely fall to prophecy. He engaged in acute speculations about what might happen if something that had not happened had chanced to happen, and somehow found delight in the dramatic idea that because some imagined prehistoric monster had made a trail across a marsh, the trail had presently become a creek, and then the creek a river. Because of the river a city grew, a statesman arose, a nation stood on star-crowned heights. His pleasing fancy went on to the effect that had the monster gone some other way the whole world would have been otherwise than as we know it.

Naturally it was quite within the order of things that he should interest himself in theories of environment and heredity. His viewpoint, accounting for geniuses and also criminals, was very similar to the viewpoint of the parodist of Edgar Lee Masters, who wrote in Reedy's Mirror, in Spoon River style, more or less,

There was a butcher, who, for the love of a chorus  
lady,  
Disemboweled himself with a meat-ax upon her sofa.  
Now I do not say it was wrong,  
I do not particularly blame the man.  
But when a healthy male animal would make such  
shift,  
Over an amour with an abandoned woman,  
There must be something wrong in the community  
that bore him.

So this teacher looked upon man as a kind of puppet quite without autonomy, a thing squeezed, driven, led, flattened, constricted by pressure both without and within. "Give me data," he would cry appealingly, in a way that always made me think of King Richard calling for a horse at Bosworth, "give me data, then, knowing your environment and parentage I shall come near to predicting your future. But the data must be correct."

That last sentence he said in italics, sometimes in capitals, doubtless conscious of the fact that his voice was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, for correct data he seldom got from us, even about such common though world-rocking events as the affair of Bunker Hill, or the death of Caesar. Once, I remember, he declared stoutly for the omniscience of man, saying, "There is not a single thing in the universe for which the mind of man cannot account," then shot this question at us who sat so composedly before his battery of mighty thoughts:

"How do you account for Robert Burns? Without any such educational advantages as you have, he stepped forth a genius. Why?"

At our silence he drew himself up to his full height, posed for a moment with a sort of pathetic dignity, then,

as it were, abandoning us, asked himself questions and answered them; "Was it environment? Somewhat. Apply Taine's theory. The rugged country made for ruggedness of expression. But heredity counted for more. Far more. It was not to his mother, but to his father that he owed his genius. Note that."

The silly man, you see, was one of those who think that a thing must be either black or white, forgetting that there are numberless other hues. Trying to account for the poet, he forgot, or never thought anything about a thousand other factors, the benediction of the skies, and what someone once called "the thin, invisible trumpets that sound across the meadows of the Spring." Nor did he think about dreams, or about aspirations, or about rough lovers and horny-handed friends, or about the generous aims of youth. He was ignorant of the fact that there were some, their existence almost unsuspected by men, who had chanced to touch hands with the gods. He forgot that there were some in whose minds ideas flashed like summer lightning, others who beheld joyful things and wished their fellows to share their joy, others who knew the secret that lay in beauty, and still others who could find nurture in common and homely things.

Now in those days I knew nothing at all about Robert Burns, but got along very well in the study misnamed Literature by the mere parrot repetition of a few meaningless words, and I mention it because I was one of several tens of thousands in the same case. Had an examination paper been set before me with the question, "Tell, in few words, what you know of Robert Burns," I would have written,—*"Robert Burns. Ayrshire poet. Born 1759, died 1796. Wrote Scottish songs, best known of which are 'Auld Lang Syne,' and 'John*



Anderson My Jo.' Wrote 'Cotter's Saturday Night,' etc."

That would have sufficed for all parties concerned. As an afterthought, to please the teacher, I would have added, "Probably owed his genius to influence of father." That being done to satisfy authority, Robert Burns would have been thrust away in some mental cupboard and taken for granted.

Luckily for us, as it seemed, in the case of Burns there were dark mysteries about which we were not expected to be curious. That is to say, frequently we were burdened with facts about the lives of writers, as that Shakespere stole deer, that Southey disliked Byron and Byron disliked Southey, that Sheridan died in a wretched lodging house most hopelessly in debt, that Goldsmith played the flute in France; but in the case of Burns our instructor seemed to have solid grounds for withholding details about the man's life. At least we gathered as much from dark hints. "A certain rudeness of conduct," was the way the man put it, frowning and nodding his head disapprovingly, and speaking in a rich tone of voice. He seemed shocked because of something. So a cheerfulness of spirit filled us because our burden was lighter. Burns' lapses from perfection did not concern us. The study of literature would have been easier had every writer, from Venerable Bede down to Tennyson, been guilty of rudeness of conduct, for then our lives had been freer, nobler, more blessed.

So, while we "took Burns," hurdling over him in a stride, at school I learned nothing at all about him or his works. Now and then there were orators, gold and pinch-beck alike, who quoted with heavy seriousness a line or two, in a queer manner and accent under the illu-

sion that they were giving the proper Scotch twang, as

A man's a man for a' that,

and

. . . pleasures are like poppies spread—

You seize the flower, its bloom is shed.

and

O wad some power the giftie gie us,

To see ourself as others see us,

It would frae many a blunder free us, (from)

And foolish notion,

and

The best laid plans o' mice and men

Gang aft agley; (askew)

while in print I saw often,

A chile's amang ye takin' notes,

Ah, faith, he'll prent it.—*Burns*,

and also.

The mirth and fun grew fast and furious.—*Burns*.

But nothing came to the front from either orator or writer, on closer acquaintance, to indicate that they knew anything at all about the poet they quoted so scrappily. Because of that I came to look upon Burns much as I looked upon Butler of "Hudibras," or Frances Burney, or Michael Wigglesworth, or any one of several dozen names in literature. They were there in the book because they were there, and the passages in the book concerning them could be dispensed with as easily as the Introduction, which had no purpose at all. By a sort of mechanical habit the strange nobodies were retained in the list of worthies, and if at one time they had been



regarded as great and luminous personalities, then their prominence arose because of the utter and inexplicable dullness of their contemporaries. They appeared to be swift, as it were, because they strolled among a slow, groping crowd. If they seemed to be giants it was because they were surrounded by Lilliputians. Thus I saw things, nor would it be worth while setting all that down were it not that my viewpoint coincided with the viewpoint of my companions, all of them youths much given to reading.

Not indeed until I came under the wholesome influence of the golden revolutionaries of the 1880's, Shaw and William Morris and Hyndman and Stead and Prince Kropotkin and the men of the Fabian society, did I see anything but a name in Burns. But not on first joining with them came my enlightenment, because for a long time the economic welfare of man seemed to me to be all that was worth while, literature appearing as nothing more than a mere toy for idle and effeminate fellows. But there came a day when literature and revolution rushed together like twin stars, and then, in a burst of splendor a new world lay about me. That illumination came by way of the poem "Sophie Perovskaya," Joaquin Miller's work. I read it in some socialist pamphlet, but with no excitement until I came to the stanza that dealt with the death of the Czar when a nihilist threw a bomb. So I got my first real thrill of enjoyment through the medium of poetry reading this:

A storm burst forth! From out the storm  
The clean, red lightning leapt!  
And lo! A prostrate royal form . . .  
And Alexander slept!  
Down through the snow, all smoking warm,  
Like any blood, his crept.

*Yea, one lay dead, for millions dead!  
 One red spot in the snow  
 For one long damning line of red;  
 While endless exiles go—  
 The babe at breast, the mother's head  
 Bowed down, and dying so!*

Now we talked much about bursting storms in that day and in that circle, telling one another, as we sat in a coffee house, that progress needed an occasional tempest to clear away dead branches and make place for new growths, dead branches, of course, being symbolical of aristocrats and titled persons. So with what delight did I hear a man, John Burns, said to be of the Robert Burns' blood, recite, doing it astonishingly well, "A Man's a Man for a' That." It was the Burns who afterwards went to prison for rioting, and who later became a Member of Parliament, then a Cabinet member. Clear and crisp, with naturalness and spontaneity he called on us to

See yon birkie ca'd "a lord,"  
 Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that?  
 Tho' hundreds worship at his word,  
 He's but a cuif for a' that. (blockhead)  
 For a' that, an' a' that,  
 His ribband, star, an' a' that,  
 The man o' independent mind,  
 He looks an' laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak a belted knight,  
 A marquis, duke, an' a' that!  
 But an honest man's aboon his might— (above)  
 Guid faith, he muana fa' that!  
 For a' that, an' a' that,  
 Their dignities, an' a' that,  
 The pith o' sense an' pride o' worth  
 Are higher rank than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may  
 (As come it will for a' that)  
 That Sense and Worth o'er a' the earth  
 Shall bear the gree an' a' that!  
 For a' that, an' a' that,  
 It's comin yet for a' that,  
 That man to man the world o'er  
 Shall brithers be for a' that. (brothers)

Hearing that, down went the barrier that had barred me from Burns as an old-fashioned eighteenth century poet. The modern ring of it swept me along. It was as modern in spirit as Walt Whitman's "The Great City," "where no monuments exist to heroes but in the common words and deeds," and "where the populace rise at once against the never-ending audacity of elected persons." It had the brazen ring of opposition to established authority that I, and others with me, had found in the revolutionary James Thomson ("B. V."), whose lurid poem "Despotism Tempered by Dynamite" had led us to Shelley, not the ethereal Shelley of "Alastor" and "Queen Mab" and "Prometheus Unbound," but the Shelley of

Men of England, wherefore plough  
 For the lords who lay ye low?  
 Wherefore weave with toil and care,  
 The rich robes your tyrants wear?

Wherefore feed, and clothe, and save,  
 From the cradle to the grave,  
 Those ungrateful drones who would  
 Drain your sweat—nay, drink your blood!

It was a Burns as disrespectful of the self-consciously superior as was that Whittier who had scarified the clergy attending and approving a pro-slavery meeting, with his

Just God!—and these are they  
Who minister at Thine altar, God of Right!  
Men who their hands with prayer and blessings lay  
On Israel's Ark of light!

What! preach and kidnap men?  
Give thanks,—and rob Thy own afflicted poor?  
Talk of Thy glorious liberty, and then  
Bolt hard the captive's door?

Literature and revolution had indeed joined together and a most dazzling and joyous light broke over a new world.

But Burns, for me, and for many others who gathered together in that splendid company of revolutionists, did not leap into the stature of a giant until I heard his "Bannockburn" recited. After that I bought a book of Burns' poems for a penny, in the series brought out by that extraordinary editor and publicist, William T. Stead, who really did have a public with tastes and requirements and discernment. For that public he printed books of poetry, of essays and of biography in inexpensive editions, which were sold at railway news-stands, and hawked at street corners, and displayed for sale at newsdealers everywhere. And Burns sold by the hundreds of thousands, not because the time was the hundredth anniversary of the appearance of Burns' first book, but because the spirit that animated us was exactly the spirit that animated Burns when he wrote his revolutionary poems, also because a spirit of healthy revolt moved both Great Britain and the United States. We burned to set wrong things right. We took up causes—the cause of Ireland, the cause of the unemployed, the cause of the Chicago anarchists condemned to be hanged because of the Haymarket riots, just as Burns on his part

had taken up causes, and the poems he made awakened in us the same emotions that had filled him when he touched hands with the gods and sang,—a true test of good work.

As for that reciting of "Bannockburn," the business of it is strangely clear in my memory. The place was Trafalgar Square, and the time was during a meeting called and addressed by John Burns. Stead was there, and also Annie Besant who later became a theosophist; and a strange saturnine fellow who wrote "Elizabeth and England," whose name was Withington, and Hyndman and Cunninghame Graham, and that stout-hearted clergyman, Stewart Headlam. Such meetings were more or less of a free-for-all who desired to express themselves, and one who found himself moved to speak was an old Chartist named Chatterton. He was an earnest soul who printed leaflets of revolutionary hue, and one of them contained stanzas from "Bannockburn."

I can see the man now in memory, small and ragged and uncouth, but with the earnestness of a hero about him. His background that day was a picture done in gray; the gray colonnade of a church; the gray sky; the gray, muddy road; crowded omnibuses coming out of a gray mist, and hansom cabs disappearing into the gray gloom. Why I should recall people so plainly is something to wonder at, but they stand sharply etched in memory as listeners: a horse-policeman; two flower girls; a well-dressed woman in furs with a child and a collie dog; the pathetic figure of a street girl; a pompous city man who gave a coin to a boy telling him to hand it to the reciter. They stood, all of them, in a loose group separated from the main gathering, quite as attentive as though every word of the poem had been addressed to



them personally. And Chatterton radiated sincerity and enthusiasm, not for the poetry as poetry, but for the poetry as vehicle of revolutionary sentiment. His heart beat strongly for the causes that had engaged him in his youth and that still engaged him. Robert Burns had revolted against suffering and woe; Chatterton was his prophet. And Chatterton was one of the good, simple folk. With a sort of Promethean energy the old man roared

Now's the day, and now's the hour;  
See the front o' battle lour,  
See approach proud Edward's power—  
Chains and slavery!

Wha will be a traitor knave?  
Wha can fill a coward's grave?  
Wha sae base as be a slave?  
Let him turn, and flee!

Lay the proud usurpers low!  
Tyrants fall in every foe!  
Liberty's in every blow!  
Let us do, or die!  
("Scots Wha Hae")

That was the first time I came to understand the meaning of the saying I had heard so often, "the deathlessness of art." What matter that Burns sang of a purely sentimental cause? For me it meant war against the servile institution of capitalism. He sang of the breaking of "proud Edward's power," but I had in mind the emancipation of the proletariat. His "traitor knaves" stood as a symbol of all those who were not avowed revolutionaries,—churchmen, members of the House of Commons, those of all shades of political belief, millions fit to "fill a coward's grave."



Incidentally it seems worth mentioning that the poem led me to Carlyle, because I found that Carlyle had called it the "best war-ode ever written" and had said of it,

This Dithyrambic was composed on horseback; in riding in the middle of tempests over the wildest Galloway moor, in company with a Mr. Syme, who, observing the poet's looks, forebore to speak—judiciously enough—for a man composing Bruce's address might be unsafe to trifle with. Doubtless this stern hymn was singing itself as he formed it, through the soul of Burns, but to the external ear it should be sung with the throat of the whirlwind.

And such is the adventure of literature, for any man who will follow his star, that the reading of that passage took me to "Sartor Resartus," one of the books that influenced me and to some extent directed my life's way.

But to get back to the tale of Burns; it should be noted that the poet himself told Thomson that "Scots Wha Hae" was a by-product of his sympathy with the men of the French Revolution, because "the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle [Bruce at Bannockburn], associated with the glowing ideas of some struggles of the same nature, not quite so ancient, roused my rhyming mania." So there was a clear case of the poet awakening emotion on his own terms.

Such was the manner of my beginning with Robert Burns, and there went crashing to the ground the flimsy edifice built by my well-meaning but mistaken school teacher. And, as with other things connected with the man, it would not be worth mentioning were it not that the ideas pumped into me were the ideas that had been pumped into millions, and are the ideas of millions, if

indeed there are millions apart from Scots who think of Burns at all.

Consider this matter of environment in the light of common sense, especially that phase dwelt upon by theorists when they advance the opinion that the stimulus of narrow poverty was in some mysterious way responsible for the production of a genius. You find Mr. Bok saying something of the kind in his "Why I Believe in Poverty," very primly and prettily, but not at all convincingly. For a moment's straight thinking would seem to be sufficient to convince any man of commonsense that if poverty helped in the production of genius, then the world would have been crowded with intellectual giants. On the other side of the balance sheet a glance at things as they are would prove that the result of poverty must needs be a despairing apathy, or a cloddishness, or what is far worse, a species of selfishness miscalled ambition by which one here and there becomes determined to swim where thousands sink, and, succeeding at whatever cost to his fellows, becomes filled with that self-conscious superiority which is the mark of a snob and a cad.

Burns was not born in the sordid poverty that hangs about a city slum. It would be difficult to find anything good that has come out of such a mephitic atmosphere as hangs there. The countryside would hardly produce anything like the misery of a city. You get something of the hardship that Burns knew, in his poem, "Twa Dogs," where the collie Lauth says:

They're nae sae wretch'd ane wad think:  
Tho' constantly on poortith's brink, (poverty's)  
They're sae accustom'd wi' the sight,  
The view o't gies them little fright.

Then chance an' fortune are sae guided,  
 They're ay in less or mair provided; (more)  
 An' tho' fatigu'd wi' close employment,  
 A blink o' rest's a sweet enjoyment.

Still, while the sordidness of poverty in a city is absent, there are the cramped conditions and narrow opportunities, so that it is something to marvel at that Burns could have had his vision of independence, not merely political, but independence of that rarest sort that grows out of a belief in one's self. For his was a sort of devil-may-care philosophy. You get the keynote of it in one of his jolly, free-and-easy songs which I quote:

#### MY FATHER WAS A FARMER

My father was a farmer upon the Carrick border, O,  
 And carefully he bred me in decency and order, O.  
 And bade me act a manly part, though I had ne'er  
 a farthing, O,

For without an honest, manly heart no man was  
 worth regarding, O.

Then out into the world my course I did deter-  
 mine, O:

Tho' to be rich was not my wish, yet to be great  
 was charming, O.

My talents they were not the worst, nor yet my  
 education, O—

Resolv'd was I at least to try to mend my situa-  
 tion, O.

In many a way and vain essay I courted Fortune's  
 favour, O:

Some cause unseen still slept between to frustrate  
 each endeavour, O.

Sometimes by foes I was o'erpower'd, sometimes  
 by friends forsaken, O,

And when my hope was at the top, I still was  
 worst mistaken, O.

Then sore harass'd, and tir'd at last with Fortune's  
vain delusion, O,

I dropt my schemes like idle dreams, and came to  
this conclusion, O:—

The past was bad, and the future hid; its good or  
ill untried, O,

But the present hour was in my pow'r, and so I  
would enjoy it, O.

No help, nor hope, nor view had I, nor person to  
befriend me, O;

So I must toil, and sweat, and broil, and labour to  
sustain me, O!

To plough and sow, to reap and mow, my father  
bred me early, O:

For one, he said, to labour bred was a match for  
Fortune fairly, O.

Thus all obscure, unknown and poor, thro' life  
I'm doom'd to wander, O,

Till down my weary bones I lay in everlasting  
slumber, O.

No view nor care, but shun whate'er might breed  
me pain or sorrow, O,

I live to-day as well's I may, regardless of to-  
morrow, O!

But, cheerful still, I am as well as a monarch in a  
palace, O,

Tho' Fortune's frown still hunts me down, with  
all her wonted malice, O;

I make indeed my daily bread, but ne'er can make  
it farther, O.

But, as daily bread is all I need, I do not much  
regard her, O.

When sometimes by my labour I earn a little  
money, O,

Some unforeseen misfortune comes gen'rally upon  
me, O:

Mischance, mistake, or by neglect, or my good-  
natur'd folly, O—

But, come what will, I've sworn it still, I'll ne'er  
be melancholy, O.

All you who follow wealth and power with un-  
remitting ardour, O.

The more in this you look for bliss, you leave your  
view the farther, O.

Had you the wealth Potosi boasts, or nations to  
adore you, O,

A cheerful honest-hearted clown I will prefer be-  
fore you, O!

As I have said, the child Burns was born in no such  
sad surroundings as Taine and some others who have  
written about him would have us believe.

In a cottage of clay built by his father, . . . a sad  
condition, a sad country, a sad lot. A part of the  
gable fell in a few days after his birth, and his mother  
was obliged to seek refuge with her child, in the  
middle of a storm, in a neighbor's house. It is hard to  
be born in this country. The soil is wretched; and  
there are many bare hills, where the harvest often  
fails.

So wrote Taine, telling the truth, but yet giving an im-  
pression of circumstances more tragic than existed. One  
biographer, George A. Aitken, adds, talking of the affair  
of the roof, "The accident was symbolical of a life of  
trouble that was to follow," which sounds well but  
means nothing. Still, Burns himself helped to make his  
own case appear worse, dabbing a little gray here, and a  
little dun coloring there, in an artistic way.

A blast of Janwar' win'  
Blew hansel in on Robin, (birth-gift)

he says. And, in "The Vision" he writes of the cottage in which he was born,

There, lanely by the ingle-cheek, (fire-side)  
I sat and ey'd the spewing reek (rising smoke)  
That fill'd, wi' hoast-provoking smeeek, (cough...smoke)  
The auld clay biggin; (dwelling)  
An' heard the restless rattons squeak (rafters)  
About the riggin.

All in this mottie, misty clime, (dust-laden)  
I backward mus'd on wasted time.

Still, there is such a thing as impressionism. Robert Burns' more matter-of-fact brother, Gilbert, gives, in a letter written to the Burns' biographer Dr. Currie, what might be called a corrected impression. It is to be found in a letter written from Dinning in Dumfriesshire, dated Octr. 24th, 1800, and runs, in part:

. . . The story you heard of the gable of my father's house falling down, is simply as follows:—When my father built his "clay biggin," he put in two stone jambs, as they were called, and a lintel, carrying up a chimney in his clay gable. The consequence was, that as the gable subsided, the jambs, remaining firm, threw it off its center; and, one very stormy morning, when my brother was nine or ten days old, a little before daylight a part of the gable fell out, and the rest appeared so shattered, that my mother, with the young poet, had to be carried through the storm to a neighbor's house, where they remained a week till their own dwelling was adjusted. That you may not think too meanly of this house, or my father's taste in building, by supposing the poet's description in "The Vision" (which is entirely a fancy picture) applicable to it, allow me to take notice to you, that the house consisted of a kitchen in one end, and a room in the other, with a fireplace



and chimney; that my father had constructed a concealed bed in the kitchen, with a small closet at the end, of the same materials with the house; and, when altogether cast over, outside and in, with lime, it has a neat comfortable appearance, such as no family of the same rank, in the present improved style of living, would think themselves ill-lodged in.

Certainly a picture of the interior of the cottage makes a scene pleasant enough and far more enticing than the appearance of many a frame house in the United States; the dresser lined with plates and pewter; the large open fireplace; the well-made cupboard; the deep-set window; to say nothing of the substantial chairs and clock and table.

The thing that counts is the depressing effect on the family that came from the thwarted efforts, and the disappointments, and the fruitless struggles of William Burnes, the father, a land-hungry man with no land of his own, forced to live on that which he rented. The poet remembered how, as a boy aged seven, disturbing letters were read in the family circle after they had all moved from Burns' birthplace at Alloway Kirk, to Mount Oliphant. They were letters from the factor, or agent, full of complaints and threats, for in spite of persistent work no headway could be made on a farm where the soil was thin and sour. And the owner had to have his money by hook or crook, as non-resident owners do, knowing nothing of conditions, unable indeed to comprehend them if he saw them.

Nor did things mend when the family took another farm at Lochlea. The new farm was a better one and things might have gone well in time, but things were at sixes and sevens because of a misunderstanding about the

lease. When the matter in dispute was referred to arbitrators the decision went in favor of the owner, and if it was not the last straw that broke the camel's back, at least it coincided with the physical breakdown of the poet's father. Consumption took him at the age of sixty-three, on February 13th, 1784. But by that time Robert Burns the poet was aged twenty-four and the stream of his life had long since separated from the parent stream.

Yet there had been the impressionable years, and those years of such composition that the boy must needs leap from babyhood into young manhood without knowing the heaven that is supposed to stand, and should stand, about every infancy. On such a farm, indeed on almost any farm, a child begins to be useful as soon as it can walk.

Then at the age of six young Robert Burns commenced his schooling, and that means much. In those days Scotland far outshone England where learning was concerned. Scotland's teachers believed in a sound and solid foundation in the rudiments of learning. The paths of learning were not rose-bordered, nor was there any royal road to knowledge. Scotland had ideas upon national character and those ideas and ideals necessitated stern insistence upon discipline and docility and thoroughness. The memory had to be trained. Habits of concentration had to be formed. Education was a process of training the intellect. Your Scot was free from the superstition prevalent with us that by sending a child to school an education was automatically gained much as a sponge becomes saturated when it is held in a tub of water.

Moreover, the school day at an end, there were household duties that began; and when they ceased with dark there had to be study by candle-light. Nor was it easily

possible to escape that last because often, as in the Burns' case, the teacher boarded with the farmers who employed him and paid his salary, turn and turn about, and young men of the John Murdoch type, for that was the name of the Burns' teacher, were expected to earn every penny they received and lived up to the expectation.

However, the strain comes, not in unalloyed work, but in work mixed with worry, and of that last there was enough and to spare. In after years Burns attributed his fits of melancholia and nervous troubles to an over-worked childhood, though there is reason to doubt that his moods of pessimism were more frequent than such moods in the average man. Buoyancy was a marked characteristic of the man in spite of all that has been said and written. Always you find the upward lift. Take his "Epistle to Davie" as an example, though many other examples could be given,—always you find the light-hearted view, for your man of rich and full nature must be an optimist.

It's hardly in a body's pow'r,  
 To keep, at times, frae being sour,  
 To see how many things are shar'd;  
 How best o' chieles are whyles in want, (children...sometimes)  
 While coofs on countless thousands rant,  
 And ken na how to ware't;  
 But, Davie, lad, ne'er fash your head, (trouble)  
 Tho' we hae little gear;

We're fit to win our daily bread,  
 As lang's we're hale and fier: (sound)  
 "Mair spier na, nor fear na," (more ask)  
 Auld age ne'er mind a feg; (fig)  
 The last o't, the warst o't,  
 Is only but to beg.

To lie in kilns and barns at e'en,  
When banes are craz'd, and bluid is thin,  
Is, doubtless, great distress!  
Yet then content could make us blest;  
Ev'n then, sometimes, we'd snatch a taste  
Of truest happiness.  
The honest heart that's free frae a'  
Intended fraud or guile,  
However Fortune kick the ba', (ball)  
Has ay some cause to smile;  
And mind still, you'll find still,  
A comfort this nae sma';  
Nae mair then, we'll care then,  
Nae farther can we fa'.

What tho', like commoners of air,  
We wander out, we know not where,  
But either house or hal'?  
Yet Nature's charms, the hills and woods,  
The sweeping vales, and foaming floods,  
Are free alike to all.  
In days when daisies deck the ground,  
And blackbirds whistle clear,  
With honest joy our hearts will bound,  
To see the coming year:  
On braes when we please then,  
We'll sit an' sowth a tune; (hum)  
Syne rhyme till't we'll time till't,  
An' sing't when we hae done.

At the risk of being condemned for iteration I say that in a million cases such cramping environment could have resulted in nothing but complete surrender and despairing apathy, with all the evils that come in their train. Or it might have produced that strange capacity for suffering, result of agony after agony, which we see in so many. Rare enough are the cases where men and women rise above miserable experiences, fighting away

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and becoming strengthened by the fight, discovering an emotional experience and bringing it to the service of art. We wrap too many things up in words, in this world. If we will think of Burns, not as a figure apart, and strange to our own experience and knowledge, but as some back-hills man to whom we would have nothing at all to say if we sat near him in some country in a hotel lobby because of his apparent intellectual distance from us; then if we further imagine seeing this back-hills man scrawling something on a chance sheet of paper, his writing clumsy and slow because his hands were hardened and his fingers crooked from much grasping of spade and plow handle; then supposing a chance glance at the paper revealed this kind of thing,

a

Inscription for an altar to Independance —  
~~of them~~ an independant mind  
 A soul resolved a soul resigned;  
 Prepared Porter's bravest frown to brave,  
 Who will not be ~~not~~ have a slave;  
 Virtue alone who dost reverse,  
 Thy own reproach alone dost fear,  
 Approach this shrine & worship here!

the chances are that you would not trouble to decipher the scrawl. And what would be your astonishment had you read the scrawl with proper patience to discover your despised peasant compelling your admiration as a creature all glorious and sublime when you made out this:



If thine an independent mind,  
A soul resolved a soul resigned;  
Prepared Power's proudest frown to brave,  
Who will not be nor have a slave;  
Virtue alone who dost revere,  
Thy own reproach alone dost fear,  
Approach this shrine & worship here.

These are more than words. They are hopes and deeds. Not environment but a flame lit in the heart brings the sort of hope for humanity that burned in the man when he penned that. And, while one cannot prove, but only affirm, it would seem that the other enthusiast, Burns' near-contemporary Shelley, forms a case of a kind to shatter the theorist's shallow guess. For there was a lad poles apart from Burns, brought up in sheltered surroundings with all educational advantages, his father an easy-going, good-humored country gentleman, his circle apathetic where the welfare of others was concerned. "They may," said one of Shelley's uncles, on a day when P. B. S. was particularly eloquent, "they may set up Plato's Republic in Horsham tomorrow if they like, but I would not lift my leg from this stool to hinder or to help it."

And so, out of two quite different environments, came strange creatures strangely alike. It is only possible to hold fast to the narrow environment by saying, in a shuffling way, that both youths had a vision of a finer and a nobler life than that which they knew. Doing that, you change the term environment to read Revolt against Established Things, and revolt against things as they are is as common among thinking men, as well as among geniuses, as are the hands and feet.

The truth is that environment, considered as cause



for this and that, may serve very well for the more plastic part of humanity; but it cannot be wrenched into shape to account for creative intellects. Personality is personality, it eludes analysis; it is the coming out of a self from many selves. It is not woven out of common stuff of the world. The environment may be changed or it may be shattered, still the personality stands immune. And, if you will consider the matter somewhat, you must come to the conclusion that the theory of environment, strongly pushed, possesses all the weaknesses that the old theory of astrological influence possessed.

We have looked at Burns, seeing him as we would see a back-hills man of our day, for the best way to think of Then is to think of Now, and the best way to realize There is to have in mind our Here, seeing straight. So to closely realize the surroundings that Burns in his youth and childhood knew, you must go among the hill farmers of many of these States today. For it is most utter nonsense to indulge in high-flown talk about the superior standard of living that exists with us here and now, as compared with the standard existing in the middle 1700's in Scotland, political rhetoricians notwithstanding. Indeed, had I to choose between the lot of a renter, judging by some I have known and others I now know intimately, and the lot of a farm laborer such as Burns was, I would accept the latter without hesitation. He and his kind had at least the comfort of the village inn and social mirth, honest cakes and ale on occasion. But there is no such joy for the back-hills renter at the end of his day's work, not even the joy of blazing logs in open fire-places,—for alas! the cheap iron stove has supplanted the hearth. And should the man of the soil today feel the natural need of a social glass, then he must

needs become a law-breaker, drinking secretly with agitated soul. Burns could, and did, find congenial souls. In the midst of a gray life there were glorious hours.

It is easy to infer what might have been in the way of merriment and good times when memory prompted so merry an elegy as that which Burns wrote "On John Dove, Innkeeper":

Here lies Johnie Pigeon;  
What was his religion  
Whae'er desires to ken (know)  
To some other warl' (world)  
Maun follow the carl, (old fellow)  
For here Johnie Pigeon had nane!

Strong ale was ablution;  
Small beer persecution;  
A dram was *memento mori*;  
But a full flowing bowl  
Was the saving his soul,  
And port was celestial glory!

Surreptitious drinking of white-mule, or of Jamaica ginger, or of vanilla extract behind the barn could never evoke so triumphant a piece of merriment. And for those sad folks who confuse sociability and swinishness, who understand nothing of the real fullness of life, who impose their prejudice with a kind of dry insolence, there is the bacchanalian song, and a glorious one, "Willie Brew'd a Peck o' Maut." There's joy in it, the heartfelt joy that Rob and Allan knew, for the cronies did not have to meet in secrecy as we do today, fearing a dry detective in every bush. When they met there was an unaffected intercourse of spirits, an eager happiness, an ebullition of the spirit of youth.

O, Willie brew'd a peck o' maut, (malt)  
 And Rob and Allan cam to see;  
 Three blyther hearts that lee-lang night (live-long)  
 We wad na found in Christendie.

We are na fou, we're nae that fou, (drunk)  
 But just a drappie in our e'e!  
 The cock may crawl, the day may daw,  
 An' aye we'll taste the barley-bree!

Here are we met, three merry boys,  
 Three merry boys I trow are we;  
 And monie a night we've merry been,  
 And monie mae we hope to be! (more)

It is the moon, I ken her horn,  
 That's blinkin' in the lift sae hie:  
 She shines sae bright to wyle us hame, (entice)  
 But, by my sooth, she'll wait a wee!

Wha first shall rise to gang awa,  
 A cuckold, coward loon is he!  
 Wha first beside his chair shall fa',  
 He is the King amang us three!

The man who confuses that sort of conviviality with  
 potulency is quite hopeless. To be sure, Burns, like every  
 other good-soul of his day, did overstep on occasion, but  
 you will see that it was not sottishness he sung.

It's no I like to sit an' swallow,  
 Then like a swine to puke an' wallow;  
 But gie me just a true guid fellow  
 Wi' right ingine, (wit)  
 And spunkie ance to mak us mellow, (drink enough)  
 An' then we'll shine!

In plain words, Robert Burns sings the common life  
 and the simple joys of the common man. He also sang  
 their woes, and the woes that beset the people of the soil

then are the woes that beset them now. But there is this great difference between then and now. That narrow Puritanism which Burns denounced was a receding wave. A new wave has swept into view and we are threatened with submersion.

Once, on a sheep ranch, in the Falkland Islands, I had a glimpse of things as they probably were with the lad Burns. There was a very old man, a Scot from near Mossiel, who sang in a quavering voice some of those bawdy songs made by Burns which are not to be found in any of the collected works, and incidentally one song not to be found in that collection with an underground circulation. After singing this song, the old man fell into a reminiscent mood, telling what he said he remembered his father to have said. Whether the old man lied outrageously, or whether he embroidered truth, does not very much matter. At any rate, many of the things he said rang true. One of the tales related how a village rhymer named Andrew Horner had great reputation for the making of doggerel verses of topical or local interest, and how the company would gather in the inn where the inn-keeper would give out a line upon which Horner would improvise. On Horner's birthday the assembled company gathered at a feast, the table set out with a large stoneware dish full of broth, a dish of sheep's head and trotters, another dish of baked potatoes and still another of haggis, and every man with his beer mug. The inn-keeper gave out the line,

In seventeen hunner an' thretty nine

and the guests sat expectant.

Master Horner hemmed and hawed, cleared his throat, looked up to the ceiling as if to invoke his muse, took a

drink, then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, made throat noises and began,

In seventeen hunner an' thretty nine—

then hemmed and hawed once more. Again he attacked the verse with no result. Utterance would not come. The springs of emotion remained fast sealed. "Then," said the old man, "upsake the bairn, Robbie Burns, a laddie wi' e'e bricht an' shinin'," heeding not at all indignant remonstrance, and impudently articulated, with

In seventeen hunner an' thretty nine  
The de'il took stuff to mak' a swine  
An' set it in a corner.

But vera soon he changed his plan  
An' turned the stuff into a mon  
An' called it Andrew Horner.

I give it as I heard it. I find the poem in the Cambridge Edition of the Complete Poetical Works of Robert Burns given somewhat differently, thus:

#### ON ANDREW TURNER

In Se'enteen Hunder'n Forty-Nine  
The Deil gat stuff to mak a swine,  
An' coost it in a corner;  
But wilily he chang'd his plan,  
An' shap'd it something like a man,  
An' ca'd it Andrew Turner.

The amusing tale may be true or not. Its value lies in the correct picture of one phase of the social life of Burns' Scotland, a social life far more interesting and attractive than the social life of an army of back-country renters with us. If those of Burns' day knew the holy ranters such as the Rev. Mr. Moodie, described in "the Holy Fair," they also knew honest cakes and ale. They could

make a frank and pleasant business of a social hour and a social glass. We offer nothing more than a one-sided scheme of life. For the back-woods renter, with us, there is little more than the prodigious horror of the brush-wood preacher by way of entertainment, a being as malignantly ignorant as any that has stalked across the pages of history. He is today exactly as Burns painted him.

Should Hornie, as in ancient days  
    'Mang sons o' God present him;  
The vera sight o' Moodie's face  
    To 's ain het hame had sent him  
        Wi' fright that day.

Hear how he clears the points o' Faith  
    Wi' rattlin and thumpin!  
Now meekly calm, now wild in wrath,  
    He's stampin, an' he's jumpin!  
His lengthen'd chin, his turn'd-up snout,  
    His eldritch squeel an' gestures,  
O how they fire the heart devout—  
    Like cantharidian plaisters  
        On sic a day.

The picture made by Burns in the middle seventeen hundreds fits to a T that malign influence out of which has grown much to offend common-sense decency; the Ku Klux Klan, anti-evolution laws, interference with personal liberty, a host of spies and informers and whispering tongues and unpleasant folk. Nor does Burns' picture, when extended, become less real or less truly descriptive of things as they are. Get off the beaten track and you may see Holy Fairs as I have seen them in Arkansas, in Texas, in Kentucky, in Tennessee and elsewhere.



But now the Lord's ain trumpet touts,  
 Till a' the hills are rairin, (roaring)  
 And echoes back return the shouts;  
 Black Russell is na spairin:  
 His piercin words, like Highlan' swords,  
 Divide the joints and marrow;  
 His talk o' Hell, whare devils dwell,  
 Our verra "sauls does harrow"  
 Wi' fright that day!

A vast, unbottom'd, boundless pit,  
 Fill'd fou o' lowin brunstane, (flaming)  
 Whase ragin flame, an' scorchin heat,  
 Wad melt the hardest whun-stane!  
 The half-asleep start up wi' fear  
 An' think they hear it roarin;

. . . . .

As for living conditions, two hundred years have made no perceptible change and close parallels can be made between then and there and here and now. "For several years butcher's meat was little known in the house," Burns writes somewhere. The same, in spite of the assertions of political orators with an ax to grind, might be written of tens of thousands in this land, and some years ago a knowledge of the fact came to me with a shock when I discovered that the staple diet of many hills-people was limited to sweet potatoes, coarse bacon, corn-meal bread, beans and molasses. There were seven children in the Burns family and all worked in the fields, from the youngest up. So it is in millions of cases with us in these days, and it is worse than folly to pretend otherwise, or to hide or minimize the fact. Keep your eyes open and you may see women working in fields, the baby in a basket at the end of a row of planted corn or what not, getting attention incidentally; you may see

barefooted women behind the plow, children of eight years hoeing in the hot sun from sunrise to sunset, whole families in vineyards and strawberry patches whose labors cease only when it is too dark to work; men and women whose clothing consists of shirt and overalls of commonest sort that are bought for a couple of dollars; houses without baths, uncarpeted, far from weather-tight, with corn-shuck mattresses and furniture consisting of a rough table and a couple of benches; pictures something unknown, the reading confined to mail-order catalogues and drug-store almanacs. If cows are kept, the cream is sold and the family as well as the calf must get along on skimmed-milk; butter and tea and coffee are looked upon as luxuries if not extravagances; poultry that is saleable goes to the market and the household eats that which the market refuses. But the Scots in Burns' day were either cannier or less pressed for money. They had the good sense to keep healthful things for their own table. You get a hint of that from "Cotter's Saturday Night":

But now the supper crowns their simple board,

The healsome parritch, chief o' Scotia's food; (wholesome)

The soupe their only hawkie does afford, (milk cow)

That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood; (beyond...cud)

The dame brings forth, in complimentary mood,

To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck, fell; (cheese)

Time and time again you find references to goodly hospitalities and foaming ale, and to country-side lovers who owned well-stocked farms, and old fellows who came a-wooing to no purpose.

For a' his meal and a' his maut

For a' his fresh beef and his saut

For a' his gold and white monies

His gear may buy him kye and yowes. (wealth...cows...ewes)

Also the girls sing of abundant milk and meal, and how

Frae tap to tae that cleeds me bien. (From top to toe they are comfortably clad)

Whatever of hard living they knew, they were not the folk to feed light.

It was one of the prime merits of Robert Burns that he could see straight and set down straight what he saw, quite unwarped by conventionality, prejudice, custom, pride or self-interest. He tells us, but in no whining fashion, how always there hung over the family the fear of the factor, or agent. It was a soul-burdening cloud exactly similar to that which destroys the hope of so many tens of thousands among us who live on mortgaged farms and to whom it seems that they live and toil to pay interest and taxes. One need not be a traducer of national character to admit that even a government will sell the widow's last cow to get the dollar of which the greater part must go to pay the cost of war, and another part to pay somewhat to the army of parasites that hang on to the state. But the tax-gatherer, rent collector, interest gatherer or whatever the taker-away of money may call himself, comes with no friendly face whether he should appear in person or as the agent of an institution. The man of today who has to pay, and the poet Robert Burns who describes the bullying factor he knew, have ideas in common. Burns gives the portrait in "The Twa Dogs," a poem he composed about 1785:

I've notic'd on our laird's court-day,  
 (An' monie a time my heart's been wae), (many...woeful)  
 Poor tenant bodies, scant o' cash,  
 How they maun thole a factor's snash: (bear...anger)  
 He'll stamp an' threaten, curse an' swear

He'll apprehend them, poind their gear; (impound)  
While they maun staun', wi' aspect humble, (stand)  
An' hear it a', an' fear an' tremble!

That poem of "The Twa Dogs," by the way, was a favorite with us at the time we read Ruskin and Henry George and Bellamy's "Looking Backward," and Morris' "Dream of John Ball." We were certain, in those days, that the dawn of a fairer way of life was at hand, and pointed to events to substantiate our belief. That was in the 1880's when there were riots in Chicago because men demanded an eight-hour day, when the socialist vote in Germany ran to three-quarters of a million, when a labor syndicate met at Paris, when in England the Fabian Society was formed and Wells and Shaw and the Webbs were active members. There lived then a very active clergyman named Stewart Headlam, a middle-aged man of tremendous vitality who had given serious offence to the Bishop of London because of his forward-looking views on labor and on dancing and on land matters. He edited and supported a paper called *The Church Reformer*, and in it he ran an essay on "The Twa Dogs." It seemed to us who read this essay that if the world took the poem seriously so that one-half knew how the other half of civilized humanity lived, the breach that existed between the Haves and the Have-nots must be closed by a unanimous good-will and sympathy.

And if you will read the poem, you must be struck with the modernity of it. In fact, all that is being said today about the difference that exists between rich and poor was said then by Burns, and said so much better than now.

There are the dogs, as Burns has them; the one all sleek and comfortable, that was Caesar; and there was

Luath, intellectually hard as nails, a very Ruskin of a dog who might have said, and indeed sometimes seemed to be saying as Ruskin afterwards said,—“The guilty thieves of Europe, the real scourges of all deadly war in it, are the capitalists—that is to say, the people who live by percentages on the labor of others, instead of by fair wages for their own.” At least we used to read something of that into the poem, and agree or not as you choose with the sentiments, you will find it a happy reading.

The first I'll name, they ca'd him Caesar,  
Was keepit for “his Honor's” pleasure:  
His hair, his size, his mouth, his lugs, (ears)  
Shew'd he was nane o' Scotland's dogs;  
But whalpit some place far abroad, (whelped)  
Whare sailors gang to fish for cod.

His locked, letter'd, braw brass collar  
Shew'd him the gentleman an' scholar;  
But tho' he was o' high degree,  
The fient a pride, nae pride had he; (deuce a particle of)  
But wad hae spent an hour caressin,  
Ev'n wi' a tinkler-gipsy's messin; (cur)  
At kirk or market, mill or smiddie,  
Nae tawted tyke, tho' e'er sae duddie, (ragged cur...ragged)  
But he wad stan't, as glad to see him,  
An' stroan't on stanes an' hillocks wi' him.

The tither was a ploughman's collie, (other)  
A rhyming, ranting, raving billie, (fellow)  
Wha for his friend an' comrade had him,  
And in his freaks had Luath ca'd him,  
After some dog in Highland sang,  
Was made land syne—Lord knows how lang. (long since)

He was a gash an' faithfu' tyke, (wise...dog)  
As ever lap a sheugh or dyke. (leapt...ditch)  
His honest, sonsie, baws'nt face (pleasant, white-streaked)



Ay gat him friends in ilka place;  
 His breast was white, his tousie back (shaggy)  
 Weel clad with coat o' glossy black;  
 His gawsie tail, wi' upward curl, (large handsome)  
 Hung owre his hurdies wi' a swirl. (hips)

Nae doubt but they were fain o' ither,  
 And unco pack an' thick thegither; (confidential)  
 Wi' social nose whyles snuff'd an' snowkit; (sometimes snuffed)  
 Whyles mice an' moudieworts they howkit; (moles...dug)  
 Whyles scour'd awa' in lang excursion,  
 An' worry'd ither in diversion; (each other)  
 Till tir'd at last wi' monie a farce,  
 They sat them down upon their . . .  
 An' there began a lang digression  
 About the "lords o' the creation."

### Caesar

I've aften wonder'd, honest Luath,  
 What sort o' life poor dogs like you have;  
 An' when the gentry's life I saw,  
 What way poor bodies liv'd ava. (at all)

Our Laird gets in his racked rents,  
 His coals, his kain, an' a' his stents:  
 He rises when he likes himsel;  
 His flunkies answer at the bell;  
 He ca's his coach; he ca's his horse; (calls)  
 He draws a bonie silken purse,  
 An lang's my tail, whare, thro' the steeks, (stitches)  
 The yellow letter'd Geordie keeks. (stamped guinea peeps)

Frae morn to e'en it's nought but toiling,  
 At baking, roasting, frying, boiling;  
 An' tho' the gentry first are stechin, (panting from over-feeding)  
 Yet ev'n the ha' folk fill their pechan (stomach)  
 Wi' sauce, ragouts, an sic like trashtrie, (trash)  
 That's little short o' downright wastrie, (waste)  
 Our whipper-in, wee, blastit wonner, (blasted little sinner)  
 Poor, worthless elf, it eats a dinner,



Better than onie tenant-man  
 His Honor has in a' the lan'; (*his estate*)  
 An' what poor cot-folk pit their painch in, (*put...paunch*)  
 I own it's past my comprehension.

*Luath*

Trowth, Caesar, whyles they're fash't eneugh:  
 A cotter howkin in a sheugh, (*digging...ditch*)  
 Wi' dirty stanes biggin a dyke, (*building, fence*)  
 Baring a quarry, an' sic like; (*uncovering...such*)  
 Himsel, a wife, he thus sustains,  
 A smytrie o' wee duddie weans, (*ragged children*)  
 An' nought but his han' darg to keep (*hand's labor*)  
 Them right an' tight in thack an' rape. (*thatch and rope*)

An' when they meet wi' sair disasters,  
 Like loss o' health or want o' masters,  
 Ye maist wad think, a wee touch langer, (*almost would*)  
 An' they maun starve o' cauld and hunger: (*must...cold*)  
 But how it comes, I never kend yet, (*knew*)  
 They're maistly wonderfu' contended;  
 An' buirdly chiels, an' clever hizzies, (*stalwart...girls*)  
 Are bred in sic a way as this is. (*such*)

As things were, in the way of economic worry for the common man, so they still are.

I repeat at the risk of being accused of damnable iteration, that when Burns wrote his dirge, "Man Was Made to Mourn," describing the slaves of the soil of his day, he said something quite applicable today in countless cases in these United States, where the farmer is concerned.

See yonder poor, o'er labour'd wight,  
 So abject, mean, and vile,  
 Who begs a brother of the earth  
 To give him leave to toil;  
 And see his lordly fellow-worm  
 The poor petition spurn,

Unmindful, tho' a weeping wife  
And helpless offspring mourn.

So in a way, though not in the way the theorists mean, the man did owe to his environment as we all do to some extent because all creatures must adapt themselves to their surroundings until, by sheer strength born of fighting, they come to create an environment. But the Burns environment was no very special, extraordinary or particular one. It was common, every-day life without any shock absorbers. It had in it a certain amount of gaiety as well as of humiliation when comparisons were made, but Burns had no will to humility. Millions of us stand on common ground with Burns in that respect. The difference between the majority of us and Robert Burns is that we fail to see things as they are because we stand behind a very solid wall built of prejudices and received opinions. Burns, man of quick apprehension and clear sight and lively interest and real sympathy, knew no such wall. Our strange prejudices make us victims to the popular insanity so that we spend our lives chasing the phantom of commercial success, but, mark you, seeing in our quieter moments the folly of it all. Burns could come out simply with the real and only ideal of life, which, after all, is Everyman's ideal would Everyman admit it:

To make a happy fireside clime  
To weans and wife,  
That's the true pathos and sublime  
Of human life,

and he stood four-square in opposition to everything that worked against it. He believed most heartily in the simple man. His national ideal might be said to be the establishment of an intense form of individualism rather

than a political democracy. That reflex egoism called patriotism was all very well in its way, but,

. . . while we sing "God Save the King"  
We'll ne'er forget the People,

he cried. Indeed, so very much alive to the rights of the individual was he that it is not extravagant to say that if a copy of his poems fell into the hands of a reviewer who knew nothing about the man, when or where he lived, that reviewer would be very apt to say, "This is the work of a man very much occupied with modern problems and modern ideas of advanced revolutionary hue. He seems to be a philosophical anarchist." And, indeed, Robert Burns could not have passed the immigration officials at Ellis Island.

That fury of his against the injustice of poverty sometimes led him to do more than vigorously protest. It led him to rant, and there is no disguising the fact. He seems to have taken vast pleasure in relieving himself, and says so too. There is one letter written in his after years to Peter Hill, a bookseller, part of which would give material to a soap-box orator. It is dated Jany. 17th, 1791, and runs:

Take these three guineas, and place them over against that damned account of yours, which has gagged my mouth these five or six months! I can as little write good things as write apologies to the man I owe money to. O the supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five! Not all the labors of Hercules; not all the Hebrews' three centuries of Egyptian bondage, were such an insuperable business, such an infernal task!!

Poverty! thou half-sister of Death, thou cousin-german of Hell! where shall I find force of execration

equal to thy demerits? By thee, the venerable Ancient, though in this insidious obscurity grown hoary in the practice of every virtue under heaven, now laden with years and wretchedness, implores from a stony-hearted son of Mammon, whose sun of prosperity never knew a cloud, a little, little aid to support his very existence, and by him is denied and insulted. By thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, only pines under the neglect, or writhes, in bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. By thee, the man of Genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see, in suffering silence, his remark neglected, and his person despised, while shallow Greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause. Nor is it only the family of Worth that have reason to complain of thee: the children of Folly and Vice, though in common with thee the offspring of Evil, smart equally under thy rod. Owing to thee, the man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education is condemned as a fool for his dissipation; despised and shunned as a needy wretch when his follies, as usual, have brought him to want; and when his unprincipled necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country.

But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune. *His* early extravagances and follies are fire and spirit; *his* consequent wants are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he sets out with a legal commission to plunder distant provinces, and massacre peaceful nations, he returns laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a Villain and a Lord. Nay, worst of all—alas for helpless woman! the needy wretch who was shivering at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of

casual prostitution, is ridden down by the chariot wheels of the Coroneted Rip, hurrying on to the adulterous assignation; she who, without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade!!!

Well! divines may say of it what they please; but I maintain that a hearty blast of execration is to the mind what breaking a vein is to the body; the overloaded sluices of both are wonderfully relieved by their respective evacuations. I feel myself vastly easier than when I began my letter, and can now go on to business. You will be so good then as send, by the first Dumfries carrier, all, or as many as you have by you, of the following books.

## PART II

### On Heredity and Education

THERE is a poem, much praised but rarely read outside of Scotland, of which Gilbert Burns, the brother of Robert, said:

Although the Cotter, in "The Saturday Night," is an exact copy of my father in his manners, his family devotion, and exhortations, yet other parts of the description do not apply to our family. None of us were ever "at service out among the neebors round." Instead of our depositing our "sair won penny fee" with our parents, my father labored hard, and lived with the most rigid economy, that he might be able to keep his children at home, thereby having an opportunity of watching the progress of our young minds, and forming in them early habits of piety and virtue; and from this motive alone did he engage in farming, the source of all his difficulties and distresses.

Now on "The Cotter's Saturday Night," or, to be more careful, on a certain incident described in it, has been built the theory which you find cropping up in dozens of places, that Burns owed his genius to his father. Reading the poem you have an engaging picture of the farm laborer at the end of his week's work gathering together and putting away his tools, turning homeward and presently seeing his children running

To meet their dad wi' flichterin' noise and glee  
and escorting him to "his clean hearth-stane" where he sits down to "forget his labor and his toil." Presently



the other members of the family come in and fall to talk, telling of their adventures and of the village news. Now and then the sire puts in a grave word.

. . . . .

The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

Their master's and their mistress's command,  
 The youngers a' are warnèd to obey;  
 And mind their labors wi' an eydent hand, (ardent)  
 And ne'er, tho' out o' sight to jauk or play;  
 "And O! be sure to fear the Lord alway,  
 And mind your duty, duly, morn and night;  
 Lest in temptation's path ye gang astray,  
 Implore His counsel and assisting might;  
 They never sought in vain that sought the Lord  
 aright."

Then a "neibor lad" comes in and

The wily mother sees the conscous flame  
 Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek;  
 With heart-struck anxious care, enquires his  
 name,  
 While Jenny haffins is afraid to speak; (almost)  
 Well-pleased the mother hears, it's nae wild,  
 worthless rake.

So all sit down to a meal, and,

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,  
 They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;  
 The sire turns o'er with patriarchal grace,  
 The big ha' bible ance his father's pride;  
 His bonnet reverently is laid aside,  
 His lyart haffets wearin' thin and bare; (gray side-locks)  
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,  
 He wales a portion with judicious care;  
 And, "Let us worship God!" he says with solemn  
 air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise,  
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim;  
Perhaps "Dundee's" wild-warbling measures rise,  
Or plaintive "Martyrs," worthy of the name;  
Or noble "Elgin" beats the heaven-ward flame,  
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays;

then, the reading and singing done,

. . . kneeling down to heaven's Eternal King,  
The saint, the father, and the husband prays.

In brief, the poet sees and sings the value of the family as a social and educational institution. With the perpetuation of that institution must come, in his opinion, a country's greatness.

O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!  
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent,  
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil  
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content!

And O! may Heaven their simple lives prevent  
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile!

Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,  
A virtuous populace may rise the while,  
And stand a wall of fire around their much-lov'd  
Isle.

Once more then you see Robert Burns engaging himself with what we call modern problems, but which are really world-old problems. Those problems have probably become more acute since the old theology is dead, and, paradoxically, new sects have multiplied beyond all measure. They have become more acute because that healthy insistence upon character and conduct as the aim of the cotter and thousands similar to him is no longer a universal aim. They have become more acute since the

complexity of society tends to turn men into cogs in a machine rather than living personalities, square-edged and sharp-cut. They have become more acute since the producer, the man of the soil, though flattered by political rhetoricians, is in fact passed over as a negligible equation, if not held up to scorn by smart-alec writers who have charge of the public trumpets. "Yokels," "hinterlanders," "country clowns," "clod-hoppers," are terms that meet the eye today with painful frequency in some magazines. The world-old problems have become more acute since it has become the fashion to think in terms of money instead of in terms of men and their welfare. Blatant forms of amusement have done their part in destroying the home as a social and educational institution, and what these have not effected in the way of destruction has been very effectively completed by the organizations opposed to blatancy, for churches and lodges and schools and colleges and fraternities are all officiously engaged in disrupting the home by offering entertainment. So he who would be

The tender father, and the gen'rous friend  
stands between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Discipline and doctrine, doctrine and discipline, both insisted upon to the end that a character might be formed, such was the aim of the cotter. The pursuit of pleasure for its own sake, against that the man set a firm face. You may read the long self-examination written by the poet's father if you have proper patience, to find in the midst of a maze of theological mechanism a great deal of sound common sense, very much that is significant, nothing clap-trap or mawkish, very much that is angular in a Scottish way, nothing at all consciously

rhetorical, very much that is chivalrous, very much in the way of an assertion of the dignity of human nature. The whole effort is the result of a ruthless investigation of himself and his beliefs, and many a college-educated lad of today would find himself exhausted before he could produce as thorough and sincere a piece of work. The cotter indeed was a kind of schoolmaster, and there were many like him in Scotland,—not the schoolmaster who would make of his pupil a glittering show, but the sort of schoolmaster pictured by some old writer who lived in the 1600's who said, "When schoolmasters are such as they should be, they have it in their power to new model and set right, by God's blessing, once in twenty years a whole kingdom."

Such mode of education helps a genius quite as much as it helps a common everyday man, for both, equally, must face many a lonely struggle in life. And it strengthens every man's hands does he sit down calmly to take stock of himself and to look at himself. That habit of self-examination Burns came to possess. He kept a common-place book. He started an intimate diary. He wrote self-revelatory letters. He scrutinized himself, but in no morbid way. And trying to see himself straight he saw the world straight. In his diary he wrote:

I am determined to make these pages my confidant. I will sketch every character that any way strikes me, to the best of my power, with unshrinking justice. I will insert anecdotes and take down remarks . . . without feud or favor. . . . My own private story likewise, my love adventures, my rambles; the frowns and smiles of fortune on my bardship; my poems and fragments, that must never see the light, shall be occasionally inserted.

The pity of it is that a man should pay penalty for his frankness, and, having revealed everything and hidden nothing, should be lectured, and moralized upon by unwholesome prigs and sentimentalists.

If that making of the family an educational and social institution accounts for the genius of Robert Burns, then it may be said that the poet owed his genius to his father, and in this way we may satisfy the heredity theorists. But it might as well be said here, for it needs to be said somewhere, that a very little thought should be sufficient to convince any man willing to be convinced, that genius and parentage have no connection. True, one can only affirm and not prove, still there is an affirmation that carries weight when instances produced show the affirmation to be other than a mere matter of prejudice or individual preference. And, as instances of unlikeness to parents, both in intellectual attainments and in physical appearance, it would seem possible to cite the cases of hundreds who have made their mark in the world. At least so it seemed to me when I compared the pictures of Julius Caesar and his forbears, of Napoleon and his parents, of Voltaire and Sterne and Cellini and Michelangelo with their fathers and mothers.

Unhappily for the heredity theorists, instead of parental similarity to progeny I came across many examples of extreme unconformity, as Beethoven with his drunken father, Byron with his half-crazy father, Alexander the Great with a dissolute mother and a debauchee for a father, Renan with insanity in his family, Schopenhauer with a frivolous mother and a matter-of-fact father and an imbecile brother. Conditions, indeed, seemed to bear out the theory of Tassoni who wrote a book in which he discussed the question, "How happens it that wise



fathers have very foolish children, and very foolish fathers very wise children?"

If I seem to hang too heavy a garment on too slender a peg, I answer that the Burns case is Everyman's case. Genius cannot be produced. It cannot be perpetuated. Genius is originality plus. When I read, and I have read it, that Cicero and Goethe and Cowper, that Napoleon and Scott and Cromwell, that Byron and Gray and Swift inherited their genius from their mothers, then I answer that it is by no means clear that the mothers in question outshone the average of mothers, and that so far as works are concerned, they seem to have shut themselves up in a sterile negation. The probability is that the alleged indebtedness to the maternal side of the house amounts to nothing more than a sentimentality and a polite fiction growing out of the fact that the mothers probably attended to their sons' schooling, not because they were better fitted to do that than the father, but because the father was engaged in the humdrum but all-important business of bringing grist to the mill.

In the cases of Burns and Bacon and Weber, of Schiller and of Milton, where the father paid attention to the intellectual development of the lad, the glory has been shifted to the other side of the house; but tangible evidence of the father's outstanding qualities are not forthcoming. In Burns' case, it should be added, the theorists are divided in opinion. The biographer Cunningham, for example, says "from his mother he drew his lyrical gift."

Still, hope will run high in spite of all. And so, though there is in Robert Burns' epitaph on his father not the least hint of suspicion of inherited genius, nevertheless you find the elder Burnes, according to his friend



Mrs. Riddel, expecting much from his son. "He mentioned, with seeming pride and satisfaction, the promising genius of his eldest son," she wrote. You find Burns again, in the poem inscribed to Gavin Hamilton, "Nature's Law," writing of his son Robert, then only a year old, with fond expectation. The child is going to be a greater poet than his father, runs the hope.

. . . another Burns  
With future rhymes, an' other times,  
To emulate his sire;  
To sing auld Coil in nobler style,  
With more poetic fire.

But therein is revealed another hole in the hereditary transmission of genius theory. Had Burns happened on Bacon's essay on Parents and Children he might have pondered, reading this:

The noblest works and foundations have proceeded from childless men which have sought to express the images of their minds, where those of their bodies failed. So the care of posterity is most in them that have no posterity.

And certainly so many geniuses did not marry at all, and so many who did marry had no children, and so many who did marry and have children produced those who amounted to nothing in particular. None can boast of having sprung from the loins of Thoreau, Herbert Spencer, Johnson, Pope, Jonson, Dryden, Addison, Swift, Goldsmith, Cowper, Newton, Kant, Fox, Beethoven, Pitt, Locke, Hume, Macaulay, Lamb, Handel, to name a few that come to mind. As for those who drew blanks, so far as intellectual superiority is concerned, a list would form a sad commentary for those who try to account for genius. And there are worse than

blanks, as Rembrandt's son Titus, educated with great care to be an artist, who turned out to be a no-account; Walter Scott's son ashamed of his father's literary fame; Luther's son a wastrel; William Penn's son a ne'er-do-well; Commodus, the son of Marcus Aurelius the gentle philosopher, who turned out to be a tyrant; Thomas Campbell's son an imbecile; Cicero's son a drunkard; Petrarch's son "the most refractory to letters that man of letters ever had," as someone put it.

"Look," I heard a high-falutin' orator say, "at the power of education to turn out geniuses," and he went on to enumerate, and among others named Robert Burns, then quoted part of a Burns poem, but his quotation neither fitted his speech nor revealed his acquaintance with the poet, because he misquoted sadly, and also what he imagined to represent a Scottish accent resembled a poor vaudeville actor's Swedish. But his theory set me to thinking because there are some who have held, and many who still hold, and very tenaciously, the peculiar belief that the mere mechanical act of sending children to school and college will result in the turning out of brilliant men with brilliant minds. In the special case of Burns, also in the case of many other writers, essayists and biographers have strongly insisted upon the influence of education in producing the literary giant, quite overlooking the fact that so many more had the same advantages, were equally good scholars, but remained workaday men; and, strangely, other theorists with a leaning toward a genius = mild-insanity fad have listed the name of Burns among those who were dull at school. Cesare Lombrose does that, apparently opposing the best authority.

It is my contention that there is no accounting for genius at all, neither as the result of environment, nor on the grounds of heredity, much less as growing out of education. As to the last, it often seems to me that genius develops in spite of school education, and I am convinced that a genius in a class room would naturally disturb the equilibrium, he being the superior of the instructor. It would be a case of an intellectual bull in a china shop stocked with mediocrities.

Indeed, if you will give the matter a little consideration you must see that the genius is, most decidedly, one who must give his whole self to that which occupies him, quite regardless of schedules and time limitations. He would refuse to cover a great deal of ground in the approved way of the schools because the one very special thing in his mind required so much scrutinizing. While the instructor was floundering hopelessly in a bog of explanation, the young genius would be skimming mountain heights. While the teacher voiced dull authority, the young investigator would be forming opinions utterly at variance with authority. While the don laid down laws with dogmatic severity, the pupil of genius would be mentally criticizing him as a being hopelessly bound by convention.

By an illusion only does it seem that genius and education have to do with one another, because, roughly, recognition of genius coincides with the educational period. A chance word spoken by a teacher, or by anyone else for that matter, may coincide with the bursting of the husk and the freeing of the vital thing in the genius, but no torrent of words, no voluminous library could establish genius in one not a genius. When I, being in Texas, played part of a Beethoven sonata to young

David Guion, he then a child of six years, and, finding the lad to delight in music, taught him his notes and something of the art of fingering the keys, I did nothing at all in the way of awakening, or of furthering, much less of establishing, genius. True, he had never touched a piano until I set him before the keyboard, but his genius would have unfolded had I never seen Texas. In the boy lay an all-overpowering instinct that had to find outlet. Who, I ask, could have taught Beethoven to compose a Ninth Symphony? What had teachers to do with the art of Charles Dickens? Who taught Einstein? In what class sat Claude Vernet who could draw excellently well at the age of four? What secret did someone impart to young Meyerbeer when he astonished every hearer with his piano playing at the age of five? What teacher of poesy taught Pope so that he was able to write an "Ode to Solitude" at the age of twelve, or what musician drilled Handel to the composition of a mass at the same age?

Strangely enough, the world is ready to admit that men of genius in the world of feeling, those who rightly uttered highest wisdom, have touched hands with the gods, such men as Thomas à Kempis, Fox, Bunyan, Penn, Wesley, Loyola, Augustine.

You may search libraries in vain to find theorists trying to account for the touch of the gods in the cases of Confucius, or of any messiah, by way of their parents. Nor do men try to find a key to things by way of environment or education, in those cases. The world accepts them simply as a bearer of a cup filled with divine wisdom and leaves all else an enigma not to be solved. Also the world is more than half willing to admit that

certain geniuses who were men of deep views and coherent thought were filled with a divine afflatus, such as Dante, Aquinas, Anselm, Herbert Spencer, Pascal, Tasso. But when it comes to men of action, or to many geniuses close to our own time whose work lies on the borderland between thought and action, then comes the attempt to account for things and a strange unwillingness to admit inexplicability.

The loose-thinking part of the world is quite unwilling to admit that something having the look of commonplaceness because of its universality can have had any other than a commonplace origin. That is why the good folk who were neighbors of Diogenes regarded him with suspicion when he wrote on the wall the simple truth that what ailed mankind was itself.\*

It is a strange narrowness and lack of humility which refuses to admit that there are infinite forces by no means to be grasped by the finite mind, and, also, quite ordinary truths that the world accepts with extreme reluctance. In some ways it would seem that an unknown old woman named Betty Davidson must stand as something very fine and significant in the life of Burns. She was one of those old country dames "remarkable for her ignorance, credulity and superstition," stuffed full of tales about fairies, devils, demons who appeared on Samhain Eve, magic, invisible steeds, magic threads, mythical animals

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\*"Being brought by age to the sunset of my life, and expecting at any moment to take my departure from the world with a song of joy for the fullness of my happiness, I have resolved, lest I be taken too soon, to give help to those of good temperament. If one person or two or three or four, or any small number you choose, were in distress, and I were summoned out to help one after another, I would do all in my power to give the best counsel to each. But now, as I have said, the most of men lie sick, as it were of a pestilence, in their false beliefs about the world, and the tale of them increases; for by imitation they take the disease from one another, like sheep. And further, it is only just to bring help to those who shall come after us—for they too are ours, though they yet be unborn; and love for man commands us also to help strangers who may pass by. Since therefore the good message of the Book has gone forth to many, I have resolved to make use of this wall and to set forth in public the medicine of the healing of mankind."—*Diogenes*.



and other beings; and Celtic mythology is very rich indeed. She could, and did sing songs to the nine-year-old Robert. "This cultivated the latent seeds of Poesy," wrote Burns to Dr. John Moore, in a looking-backward mood. Six years later a woman came with other tales, "a bonie, sweet, sonsie lass," then followed the bursting of the husk and the emergence of the new creature, not strongly winged yet but tremulously venturing. Of her Burns wrote, in his "Commonplace Book,"

I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I got once heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were, in a manner, the spontaneous language of my heart. The composition "Handsome Nell" was the first of my performances. It is, indeed, very puerile and silly; but I am always pleased with it, as it recalls to my mind those happy days when my heart was yet honest, and my tongue was sincere.

In another place he wrote:

This kind of life, the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing toil of a galley slave, brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of the harvest. In my fifteenth autumn my partner was a bewitching creature a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language . . . she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell; I never ex-



pressly said I loved her. Indeed, I do not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heart strings thrill like an Aeolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious rattan when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities she sang sweetly, and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. . . . She really deserved all the praises I have bestowed upon her. I not only had this opinion of her then—but I actually think so still, now that the spell is long since broken, and the enchantment is at an end.

Read a couple of the stanzas by way of sampling:

As bonie lasses I hae seen,  
 An mony full as braw;  
 But, for a modest gracefu' mien,  
 The like I never saw.

She dresses ay sae clean and neat  
 Both decent and genteel;  
 And then there's something in her gait  
 Gars one dress look weel.

There is nothing of particular promise in the poem "Handsome Nell," but it should be read by anyone who would understand the man's educative years. Burns has a very interesting criticism of it which is well worth reading as revealing the man determined to see himself.

Lest my works should be thought below criticism; or meet with a critic, who, perhaps, will not look on them with so candid and favorable eye, I am determined to criticize them myself.

The first distich of the first stanza is quite too much in the flimsy strain of our ordinary street bal-

lads; and on the other hand the second distich is too much in the other extreme. The expression is a little awkward and the sentiment too serious. Stanza the second I am well pleased with; and I think it conveys a fine idea of that amiable part of the sex—the agreeables, or what in our Scotch dialect we call a sweet sonsy lass. The third stanza has a little of the flimsy turn in it; and the third line has rather too serious a cast. The fourth stanza is a very indifferent one; the first line is, indeed, all in the strain of the second stanza, but the rest is mostly an expletive. The thoughts in the fifth stanza come fairly up to my favorite idea (of) a sweet sonsy lass. The last line, however, halts a little. The same sentiments are kept up with equal spirit and tenderness in the sixth stanza, but the second and fourth lines ending with short syllables hurts the whole. The seventh stanza has several minute faults; but I remember I composed it in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it but my heart melts, and my blood sallies at the remembrance.

Now compare “Handsome Nell” with his song to another sweetheart to see how soon he mounted on more secure wings. The stanzas are from “My Nanie, O,” written in 1784, when he had lost his heart for the time being to Nanie Fleming, a farmer’s daughter, whose singing he much admired. Nanie’s sister, noticing that the poet paid little attention to the preacher and much to the girl, in church, called Robert down, as we would say. “But, Madam,” answered Burns, “there’s no comparison between them.”

Her face is fair, her heart is true;  
As spotless as she’s bonie, O;  
The op’ning gowan, wat wi’ dew,  
Nae purer is than Nanie, O.

A country lad is my degree,  
An' few there be that ken me, O;  
But what care I how few they be,  
I'm welcome ay to Nanie, O.

But that lacks the lilting joyousness and eager happiness of "Green Grow the Rashers, O," written about the same time. A fine, moving song you would find it if you could hear it as I first did, sung by some half dozen Highlanders at shearing time, with never a woman within a hundred miles, and every one of them with some lassie in mind. The vivid exuberance of

Gie me a canny hour at e'en,  
My arms about my dearie O;  
An warly cares an' warly men,  
May all gae tapsalteerie O!

seems to me now, as it seemed to me then, nothing short of exciting. The entire song affected me as if I had met a man grasping experience firmly and unafraid to express himself.

But that is getting away somewhat from the education of Robert Burns, so to return. Burns, in some ways, like Sam Weller, had to go through very much to gain very little. There was a learning to read at the age of six, then, almost at a leap, came the "Spelling Book," the New Testament, Mason's "Collection of Prose and Verse," and Fisher's "English Grammar." That last may seem to indicate fairly smooth sailing until it is remembered that the "Spelling Book" meant serious, solid, unflinching grappling with pages of words to be memorized, for the spelling of words in those days was a something to be done with absolute sincerity, and the defining of them went with the learning to spell. There was no question

of simplified spelling to set the pace by the slowest. Grammar, too, was grammar, with parsing and analysis, with each noun identified as to its class, its number, its gender, its person and its case agreeing with the verb; there were phrases adverbial and adjectival, and coördinate phrases to examine, and preterits to be learned, and rules and exceptions to rules to "get by heart," as the term had it. That kind of drilling, which may seem ridiculous to a generation less beset by inflexible rules, at least made for the ability to read, and also to read aloud, to do which is rarer, also to concentrate.

So it comes with no shock of surprise to find that at the age of nine Robert Burns was one of the circle that sat about the fire listening to the teacher Murdoch read "Titus Andronicus." Murdoch must sadly have misjudged, forgetting or else not knowing that there were incidents in the play of a saltiness to flutter the dovescots, for the circle pronounced the book taboo and in it they ceased to read. Robert's objections seem to have been rather vociferous, for his taste at that time ran to Addison.

The earliest composition that I recollect taking any pleasure in was the "Vision of Mirza" and a hymn of Addison's beginning, "How are Thy servants blest, O Lord!" I particularly remember one half stanza, which was music to my boyish ear,

"For though in dreadful whirls we hung  
High on the broken wave!"

he wrote. Perhaps the unfavorable impression made by "Titus Andronicus" prejudiced Burns against Shakespeare; at any rate there is no evidence that he ever came to know much about the dramatist, nor indeed that he

took much interest in the Elizabethan literature. True, he confesses to a little of Ben Jonson and of Wycherly, in one of his letters to Dr. John Moore, but the interest was only a passing one. As for fiction, it was a day and a place when that kind of reading would be denounced as an idle waste of time, as a means of weakening the memory and as a probable cause to lure young people from right paths. Burns' merry advice to the belles of Mauchline in his "O Leave Novels," neatly satirizes the counsel he and his fellows received in their youth.

O leave novels, ye Mauchline belles,  
Ye're safer at your spinning wheel;  
Such witching books and baited hooks  
For rakish rooks, like Rob Mossgiel.

Your fine Tom Jones and Grandisons,  
They make your youthful fancies reel;  
They heat your brains and fire your veins,  
And then you're prey for Rob Mossgiel.

Beware a tongue that's smoothly hung;  
A heart that warmly seems to feel;  
That feeling heart but acts a part,  
'Tis rakish art in Rob Mossgiel.

The frank address, the soft caress,  
Are worse than poison'd darts of steel;  
The frank address, and politesse,  
Are all finesse in Rob Mossgiel.

"It's like to mak' a mon unsicker, a' that novel readin'," said a Scot to me, in the Argentine, and no amount of talk could convince him to the contrary. Novel reading, he held, not only used the eyes to no purpose but weakened the memory. And he set great store on a retentive memory. So did the good folk of



the Burns country. Burns wrote in his autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore, referring to those early days,

I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn, sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot-piety. I say "idiot-piety" because I was then but a child. Though I cost the school-master some thrashings, I made an excellent scholar; and against the years of ten and eleven, I was absolutely a critic in substantives, verbs and particles. . . . The first two books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read again, were "The Life of Hannibal" and "The History of Sir William Wallace." Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough that I might be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins, which will boil along there till the flood gates of life shut in eternal rest.

The titles of books he read at the age of eleven, under his father's tuition, bristle awesomely. A doubt arises whether some of them could be intelligible to a lad of that age. Salmon's "Geographical Grammar" might be well enough, so also might the odd volume of history dealing with the reigns of James I and Charles I; for it is a dull boy who is without geographical and historical interest, but what of Taylor's "Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin," and Locke "On the Human Understanding"? Fielding and Smollett were read, but *sub rosa*, it would seem. Then, when an uncle went to Ayr to buy a "Ready Reckoner or Tradesman's Sure Guide," but through some strange misunderstanding came back instead with a "Complete Letter Writer," the eleven-



year-old boy had his first literary ideal. He would excel in the epistolary art. The frank and spontaneous style of Dorothy Osborne, and the absence of formality of James Howell, charmed him as they have charmed and incited many another to better work. Presently, finely self-congratulatory, he compares his letters with those of his models.

At the age of thirteen he went to Dalrymple school, on alternate weeks, dividing work and study with his brother Gilbert; at the age of fourteen a little time was spent with teacher Murdoch at Ayr, where he studied a little French and less Latin; then, in 1774, when he was fifteen years of age, came that first inclination to the writing of poetry when he fell "heartily in love" with Handsome Nell, to which reference has already been made, and so the elementary schooling of Robert Burns came to an end—and it comes with a shock to know that almost half of his life's span had gone. But there were educational loose ends, as one might say; his going to Kirkoswald in 1776 in his seventeenth summer to learn something of mensuration and surveying, where he became interested in smugglers and their doings, interested also in Peggy Thompson, who touched him to the writing of the song "Now Wrestlin' Winds and Slaught'ring Guns," though it did not get completed until eight years later when he fell in love with Kirkoswald Peggy a second time.

In addition to mensuration and love and smugglers, the lad had a fit of that foolish conceit common to his age. He must needs play the beau, must learn something of etiquette and How to Behave as a means of furthering life and winning marvelous victories over rivals; so he

joined a dancing school. Clearly it is idolatry that would make him appear at this age as anything but an ordinary lad, now with his head in the clouds, now nothing but an ordinary though spirited lover; at one hour high-flying in rarefied air looking down on a world of enjoyment and delight, at another hour sitting in broken-hearted solemnity among the tombstones of vanished hopes. He was like any other lad at that age, forever on the verge of laughter or else of tears and sighs, unable to see life whole and steadily, foolish in a calf-love stage. "Though when young the poet was bashful and awkward in his intercourse with women," wrote his brother Gilbert, "as he approached manhood his attachment to their society became very strong, and he was constantly the victim of some fair enslaver." And, as might be expected, he sometimes saw himself in the deepest pits of tragic life and had to try to express himself accordingly. "About eighteen or nineteen . . . I sketched the outlines of a tragedy," he writes in a letter, later. But those vaporings vanished when something real in the way of trouble struck him. "The bursting of a cloud of family misfortunes . . . prevented my farther progress," is the way he put it, but the high probability is that Burns' sound common sense would have prevented in any event the going on with such stilted nonsense as this:

All villain as I am—a damned wretch,  
A hardened, stubborn, unrepenting sinner.

O injured God! Thy goodness has endowed me  
With talents passing most of my compeers,  
Which I in just proportion have abused—

If sensibly we accepted the fact that every man has his

moments of foolishness when his spirits fall to zero, and, being articulate, is urged to set the mood down in black and white, we would have less nonsense broadcast about hyperaesthesia and about the crown of thorns pressed on the head of genius.

"My constitution and frame were, *ab. origine*, blasted with a deep, incurable taint of melancholia which poisons my existence," wrote Burns, and solemn dons have repeated the saying, resolutely refusing to see the contrary, which, it would seem, is most abundantly in evidence set before them in the hundreds of light-hearted songs the man gave to the world. The trouble is that neither ordinary people, nor geniuses, will see themselves as Everyman. It is amazing to find so level-headed a man as Goethe writing about himself as though he stood unique in his moods, "My character passes from extreme joy to extreme melancholy." What of it? Is not that the experience of everyone? Will not a glass of bad wine, a badly cooked dinner, a sleepless night, the coincidence of a corn on the toe and a new pair of shoes send any man into anxieties and censures? It is part of the complexity and intricacy of life that things are thus and so.

Somewhere Goethe complains that he fails to recall the time when he passed four consecutive pleasant weeks. Can you recall uninterrupted bliss extending over a month? Can anyone? Could it be expected that nothing of the anxious and trivial should come to a man in that length of time? But you can go on with case after case of men and women who should know better, Chopin, Heine, Rossini, Verdi, Gray, Rousseau, all of them wailing in a passing mood that they can never be happy again, some of them willing victims of self-induced

disease, most of them leaping back into happiness in a wholesome way to laugh at themselves. But Burns a constitutional melancholic! To say so is silly sentimentality. Never did more buoyant spirit set pen to paper. He was too courageous and amiable to look on life as a woeful thing. He was too spirited and eupeptic to luxuriate in sorrow.

So we see him at the age of twenty-one working on his father's farm at Lochlea, somewhat of a dandy with his tied hair and his fillemot (yellow brown) plaid slung about his shoulders in a dashing sort of way, swaggering finely before the girls because he was one of six or seven who belonged to the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club. And the half dozen members of that club, it would seem, posed as tremendous fellows who knew the world. Approved candidates were expected to have a love affair or two, perhaps two or four or more. The members drank and debated, sang and told stories, discussed their own love affairs and the affairs of everyone else in sight and hearing apparently. We have a sample of that which interested them in one of the debated questions which ran:

Suppose a young man, bred a farmer, but without any fortune, has it in his power to marry either of two women, the one a girl of large fortune, but neither handsome in person nor agreeable in conversation, but who can manage the household affairs of a farm well enough; the other of them a girl every way agreeable in person, conversation, and behavior, but without any fortune, which of them shall he choose?

Upon that, and similar questions, we must suppose they ceaselessly strove to come to clear knowledge, aided,

let us hope, by Taylor's "Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin," and Locke's "On the Human Understanding," and similar learned books they had devoured, digested or assimilated.

As for general reading, in those days Burns was full of Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" and Henry Mackenzie's "Man of Feeling," with something of Macpherson's "Ossian." Mackenzie, he is reported to have said, he prized next to the Bible, a statement to be read with wonder since of all men Mackenzie was most timid and forever on the strain not to offend delicate sensibilities. He, you may recall, when asked to write a book of reminiscences, said—

What is more material, though I think I could not publish anything that would reasonably offend, I know there are people so sensitive as to be angry at being alluded to in print, even were it in praise, and it is impossible to write such a work with any hope of its being read without some personal allusions.

But Burns cared little or nothing for the owner of the toes he tramped upon. He had a sharp tongue, and a sharp tongue may hurt the more when pointed on the anvil of truth. Said his fellow club member, David Sillar,

His social disposition easily procured him acquaintances; but a certain satirical seasoning, while it set the circle in a roar, was not unaccompanied by its kindred attendant—suspicious fear. I recollect hearing his neighbors observe, he had a great deal to say for himself, but that they suspected his principles.

For example of that "satirical seasoning," here are a couple of epitaphs, very authentic, but not to be found in the school books.



First that on James Grieve, Laird (proprietor) of Boghead, Tarbolton:

Here lies Boghead amang the dead,  
In hopes to get salvation;  
But if such as he, in Heav'n may be,  
Then welcome—hail! damnation.

The second is on William Hood, a stingy souter (shoemaker) of Tarbolton:

Here Souter Hood, in death does sleep;  
To hell if he's gone thither,  
Satan, gie him thy gear to keep; (give)  
He'll haud it well together. (hold)

But at the age of twenty-two Robert Burns had no idea other than that his rhyming was an amusement. He wrote in his autobiography,

Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind, but 'twas only the humor of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or the other as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed it as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once they were lighted up, raged like so many devils till they got vent in rhyme; and then coming over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet.

His loves were his stars. His emotions flowered into poetry. He was a creature of exuberant fertility, in more ways than one. Within thirty-seven years he had to crowd much more than many men can crowd in a life of twice that span. As someone said of someone, he burned the candle at both ends and in the middle, too. Tyrant over himself, he ran out by extravagance but never for a single moment tried to retrieve by parsimony. Instead of his being a case of once bit twice shy, it was



more nearly a case of the novice becoming an adept. Almost he seems to have decided to turn Plutarch's saying inside out, and, instead of laying to his heart the lesson: *It is best to be cautious and avoid extremes*, he accepted in a devil-may-care mood: *It is best to be extreme and avoid caution*. At any rate, such would seem to be the case where women and song concerned him. Of that later.

But no man's elementary education can be said to come to an end until he tries conclusions with the world of affairs for the first time. In the year 1782, after a love affair with "a superior woman named Ellison Begbie," a farmer's daughter, which ended in the jilting of the poet, Burns decided "to do something in life."

He writes:

I joined a flax-dresser in (Irvine) a neighboring town to learn his trade, and carry on the business of manufacturing and retailing flax. This turned out a sadly unlucky affair. My partner was a scoundrel of the first water, who made money by the mystery of thieving, and to finish the whole, while we were giving a welcoming carousal to the New Year, our shop, by the drunken carelessness of my partner's wife, took fire and was burned to ashes; and left me, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence.

I, for one, cannot take the business failure very seriously as in any way affecting Robert Burns. The combination of a New Year's jubilation, a woman drunk, and a house on fire tells a story of its own to any man who knows what the New Year may mean to a Scot unreservedly abandoned to cheerfulness. Burns took a very light-hearted view of the catastrophe;—Apollo rejoiced being freed from Admetus. Taking the evidence

of the poem he wrote after the incident, it's easy to believe that he found himself tremendously glad to be rid of business cares. Judge for yourself.

O why the deuce should I repine,  
And be an ill foreboder?  
I'm twenty-three, and five feet nine,  
I'll go and be a sodger!

I gat some gear wi' meikle care,  
I held it weel thegither;  
But now it's gane, an' something mair—  
I'll go and be a sodger!

(“I'll Go and Be a Sodger”)

Certainly no one would set that in high place as a poem, but for a transport of joy it would be hard to find its equal. But the transport of joy does not fit in at all with the sentiments expressed in a letter to his father. Probably in the latter case he was trying to wrench himself into the mood the world expected him to be in, and not playing the part very well. Or he may have been suddenly touched with renewal of affection and sympathy, endeavoring with all his power to write something to lighten the heart of the old man, for that which may bear the face of a comedy to eternal youth might easily wear the mask of tragedy to a man in life's twilight.

He wrote:

As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. . . . I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am in some measure prepared to meet them. I have but just had time and paper to return my grateful thanks

for the lesson of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which, I hope, have been remembered ere it was too late. . . .

There were two influences at Irvine which meant something in this period of elementary education. The first was the discovery of Ferguson's "Scottish Poems," for reading them he "strung anew the lyre with emulating vigor." (Rab the Ranter, like many more of us, could be ridiculous enough straining after rhetorical elegance.) And Ferguson, the almost unknown Edinburgh poet who died in 1774, at the age of twenty-four, remained Burns' exemplar to the end.

The second influence was a Richard Brown, apparently one of those happy-go-lucky fellows with a fund of laughter in him. He had been educated by some wealthy man but, thrown upon his own resources, went to sea, and, according to Henley, "had the morals of his calling," whatever that may mean. Everyone concerned seems to have been censorious with Richard Brown, who, to my thinking, was nothing more than a whole-souled fellow who had freely mingled with men and had nothing of the hypocrite about him. Brown certainly did what he could to make Burns see that his rhyming was, on occasion, more than rhyming and had merit of a high order. Burns, on his part, said of Brown, "His mind was fraught with courage, independence, and magnanimity, and ever noble virtue." Then comes this, written perhaps at a time when Burns was regarding himself ruefully, as men will: "He [Brown] was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself when Woman was the presiding star . . . he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor—which, hitherto,

I had regarded with horror. There his friendship did me a mischief." When that statement met the eye of the forthright Brown he said exactly what that kind of a man would say: "Illicit love! Levity of a sailor! When I first knew Burns he had nothing to learn in that respect." And I find myself siding with the sailor. Burns was Burns, lock, stock and barrel. He would have had his affairs had Brown never left the West Indies, or had his companions been men in holy orders, and mollahs, and lamas from Tibet. I offer evidence from a letter written by Burns at a time when Burns lived in Edinburgh, when he did make "a figure in the world" and when he did enjoy most thoroughly "the bustle of the busy and the flutter of the gay."

He writes to Brown:

I have met with few things in life which have given me more pleasure than Fortune's kindness to you since those days in which we met in the vale of misery; as I can honestly say that I never knew a man who more truly deserved it, or to whom my heart more truly wished it. I have been much indebted since that time to your story and sentiments for steeling my mind against evils, of which I had a pretty decent share. My Will-o'-wisp of fate you know: Do you recollect a Sunday we spent together in Eglinton Woods? You told me, on my repeating some verses to you, that you wondered I could resist the temptation of sending verses of such merit to a magazine. It was from this remark I derived that idea of my own pieces which encouraged me to endeavor at the character of a poet. I am happy to hear that you will be two or three months at home. As soon as a bruised limb will permit me, I shall return to Ayrshire, and we shall meet; and faith, I hope we'll not sit dumb, nor yet cast out!

I have much to tell you of men, their manners, and

their ways; perhaps a little of the other sex. *Apropos*, I beg to be remembered to Mrs. Brown. There, I doubt not, my dear friend, but you have found substantial happiness. I expect to find you something of an altered, but not a different man; the wild, bold, generous young fellow, composed into a steady affectionate husband, and the fond, careful parent. For me, I am just the same will-o'-wisp being I used to be. About the first and fourth quarter of the moon, I generally set in for the trade-wind of wisdom; but about the full and change, I am the luckless victim of mad tornadoes, which blow me into Chaos. Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom; and I am at this moment ready to hang myself for a young Edinburgh widow, who has wit and wisdom more murderously fatal than the assassinating stiletto of the Sicilian African. My highland dirk, that used to hang beside my crutches, I have removed into a neighboring closet, the key of which I cannot command, in case of spring-tide paroxysms.

That, for me, has not much the appearance of a man writing to one whose companionship has brought him agonies. Rather it breathes happy memories and good companionship. Nor can anyone fail to note the dash of Don Juan about it. Later letters to Brown are no less spirited. He writes to Brown about "those old powerful foes of mine, the devil, the world and the flesh—so terrible in the fields of dissipation" and discovers, as so many of us have, that "there is a time of life beyond which we cannot form a tie worth the name of friendship." And then, like the hedonist that he was, he moralizes in this fashion,

Life is a fairy scene; almost all that deserves the name of enjoyment or pleasure is only a charming delusion; and in comes repining age [he is thirty at the time of writing] in all the gravity of hoary wis-



dom, and wretchedly chases away the bewitching phantom. When I think of life, I resolve to keep a strict look-out in the course of economy, for the sake of worldly convenience and independence of mind; to cultivate intimacy with a few of the companions of youth, that they may be the friends of age; never to refuse my liquorish humor a handful of the sweetmeats of life, when they come not too dear; and, for Futurity

The present moment is our ain (own)

The niest we never saw. (nearest)

How like you my philosophy?

Does that suggest painful reminiscences? The blitheness of it is the more extraordinary because at the time Burns wrote it he was torn between two loves, the one sharply crescendo, the other swiftly diminuendo with very tangible evidence of that peculiar Burns exuberant fertility the tale of which has so fluttered the dovecots of hypocrisy.

So comes to an end the elementary education of Robert Burns. He joined the Masons, threw himself energetically into the task of mending the wretched finances of the local lodge, went into partnership with his brothers and sisters on the death of his father to stock a farm at Moss-giel, and looked with sad eye upon the family fortunes because, as he put it in a burst of Micawber-like eloquence, "all went among the rapacious hell-hounds that growl in the Kennel of Justice."

But there was another lesson learned during his youth and he tells it to Cunningham this way:

But of all Nonsense, Religious Nonsense is the most nonsensical; so enough, and more than enough of it. Only, by and by, will you, or can you tell me,



my dear Cunningham, why a religious turn of mind has always a tendency to narrow and illiberalize the heart? They are orderly; they may be just; nay, I have known them merciful; but still your children of super-sanctity move among their fellow creatures with a nostril-snuffing putrescence, and a foot-spurning filth; in short, with that conceited dignity that your titled Douglasses, Hamiltons, Gordons, or any other of your Scottish lordlings, of seven centuries standing, display, when they accidentally mix among the many apron'd sons of mechanical life. I remember, in my ploughboy days, I could not conceive it possible that a noble lord could be a fool, or that a godly man could be a knave. How ignorant are ploughboys! Nay, I have since discovered that a *godly woman* may be a —. But hold (Here's a t'ye again!) this rum is damn'd generous Antigua, so a very unfit menstruum for scandal.

## PART III

### The Man Who Missed Boyhood

“**I** AM a judge of cresses,’ said the peasant, when he was eating hemlock,” runs an old Danish saw.

The point is that so many, like that very representative teacher of mine, think that they enjoy the privilege of setting a standard. They cherish the belief that their reasons are better and their motives cleaner than the reasons and motives of other people. It is the result of lack of flexibility of mind. It is the result of lack of experience. It is the result of incorrect perspective. “What a set! What a world!” exclaimed Matthew Arnold when reading about Shelley and his circle. And “What a set! What a world!” many have exclaimed reading about Burns and his affairs. But to thus exclaim seems to indicate a lack of proportion. People so easily shocked at dissidence from their own standards are somewhat like the old lady who, seeing the play “Anthony and Cleopatra,” said: “How different from the court life of our good queen Victoria!”

We come to the poet in his twenty-sixth year to see a Burns fighting poverty, a Burns quick to see and to feel and to utter, a Burns who spread wings and rose into glowing and glorious realms, but who also fell like a wounded bird into dismal swamps, as do all men on occasions. It is a Burns grasping at life with eager hands, a Burns of intellectual and emotional activity; it is a Burns sometimes vague and bewildered at the result of his own impetuous handling of life; often erring because

of moral feebleness, if you choose to put it so. It is a Burns entirely simple and kind, with a heart that would flutter at the crushing of a flower or at the upturning of a mouse nest. It is a Burns with a heart aflame with love, discovering all that comes in love's train; disappointment, ecstasy, grief, hate, inspiration, suffering, pleasure, misunderstanding, anxiety, bitterness, responsibility. And that fire raged with irresistible force, threatening to consume him.

Now it may be that some will read the tale of the man's life with much of the same misunderstanding with which Cowper read Burns' book of poems when first he opened it. Still, what must be must be. Literature cannot be regarded as a something for the entertainment of unsophisticated old ladies given to betake themselves to silent prayer on the slightest pretext, nor for those strangely delicate and solemn creatures who seem to be shocked at the revelation of any lapses from perfection. Robert Burns was man through and through. He had love affairs which would not concern the student of literature at all were it not for the fact, a fact standing mountain high, that his songs often grew out of his loves and were inextricably interwoven with them. Also there is this, which seems to me to damn all those self-consciously superior folk who have, in infinitely disreputable fashion, set themselves to judge the man. Burns was crystal clear and self-revelatory, with a self-revelation that was not indecent self-exposure. Few of Burns' biographers have been fair in this connection, not even Robert Louis Stevenson, nor Shairp, to say nothing of lesser lights. So much of an open book was Burns that to talk patronizingly, or forgivingly, or in supercilious way about him has all the indecency that would appear were a priest to

discuss the life of his penitent who had been frank in the confessional. Read the "Bard's Epitaph" if you would know the man. So there is this for the behoof of those who hide their own follies in the cloak of censoriousness, clasp the garment with anxious constraint lest a sudden gust reveal them as not immaculate:—could Burns have been the man that, in his loftier moments he wished he had been, he would have stood a being transfigured, alone on radiant heights.

But then you would have had no Burns, but a saint. Not even in imagination can man dwell for very long among the stars yet be known to men. And who would choose to dwell with a saint?

As I take it the sexual impulse varies in men, as one might say, from zero to a hundred; and the Robert Burns constitution was such that he stood high all the time, at blood heat as it were. Did a woman challenge him, that challenge he would accept, and in spite of all that has been pretended, and is still pretended, every man of spirit knows that women are the challengers more often than youths, if not consciously and deliberately and with malice propense, then unconsciously and in obedience to the inner promptings of their nature. The whole animal kingdom proclaims the fact that the female calls the male. Adam, too truthful to be chivalrous, stated a simple fact when he told of temptation offered which he saw no reason to refuse, nor indeed had it in his power to refuse, notwithstanding all the blinding and colliding emotions within himself.

We are at the year 1784, with William Burnes, the father, gone from the scene, with the Burns sons and daughters trying to run a farm at Mossiel and the whole

venture fated to fail, as indeed must needs be with Robert at the head of the business and his mind on other things than crops. It is unnecessary to go into details because your man with his mind on reading and verse making, on Freemasonry and on argumentative nonsense concerning the rival sects Auld Lights and New Lights, on sociability in men's company and also with a mind to gallantry, could never bring a farm to fortune's door. "The first year, from unfortunately buying in bad seed, the second, from a late harvest, we lost half of beth our crops," he writes.

A letter to a Thomas Orr, dated Nov. 11th, 1784, tells its tale of attention given to matters far removed from farm affairs.

I am much obliged to you for your last letter, tho' I assure you that the contents of it gave me no manner of concern. I am presently so cursedly taken in with an affair of gallantry, that I am very glad Peggy is off my hand, as I am at present embarrassed enough without her. I don't choose to enter into particulars in writing, but never was a poor rakish rascal in a more pitiful taking. I shall be glad to see you to tell you the affair, meanwhile, I am, your friend. Robert Burness. Mossgavil, 11th Nov. 1784.

He used to spell his name that way, but changed the spelling when he first went to live in Edinburgh.

The Peggy to which reference is made was an Elizabeth Paton of "an exceedingly handsome figure, but very plain looking; so active, so honest and independent a creature," and so on, and the news of Peggy's condition was communicated to Burns by a friend with a Rabalaisian humor, one John Rankine. Now Rankine was one of the roughly humorous sort, who, to take a single typical instance, entertaining a "sanctimonious profes-



sor" with hot toddy, pretended to weaken it by pouring out of a hot-water kettle not water but proof-whisky. I mention Rankine's notion of a joke because it is easier to understand why Burns, being informed of his approaching fatherhood, could make a rough piece of verse about it for Rankine, and, almost at the same time, allude to his parentage of an illegitimate child with rapturous emotion. To appreciate the situation in full, the "Epistle to John Rankine," too lengthy to here be printed, should be read. Besides, the purpose of this book is to send readers to Burns. The general tenor of the epistle is racy, with a hint that Peggy may have been giving favors to others besides Burns.

"The Epistle to John Rankine" may not do for fastidious senses, but the point is that Burns wrote thus and so, defiantly, refusing to bow his head where he felt no shame, in spite of the thunderings of kirk-sessions. And Rankine, being just the fellow to take a light-hearted view of the incident, must be served in his mood. The same grotesque spirit appears in another effusion sent to Rankine:—

I am keeper of the law  
 In some sma' points, altho' not a';  
 Some people tell me, gin I fa', (if)  
     Ae way or ither,  
 The breaking of ae point, tho' smal',  
     Breaks a' thegither.

I hae been in for't ance or twice,  
 And winna say o'er far for thrice;  
 Yet never met wi' that surprise  
     That broke my rest;  
 But now a rumour's like to rise—  
     A whaup's i' the nest! (curlew)

Now mark the other side of Burns when the reaction

set in. The man who does not catch hints and echoes of deep feeling has no heart for poetry, and small stock of sensibility. His wishes for his daughter's welfare are nobly expressed. It is a case of fine emotion translated into words. It is Burns as he would be if he could, standing as I have said on radiant heights. It is Burns lifted to different regions from those in which he moved when he wrote to Rankine, with all those suggestions and private meanings. I am not sure that it is altogether correct to speak of the other side, because the attitude may have risen from a strong and happy sense of cosmic humor. There are people happily gifted, who under pressure that would break the spirit of some, flow naturally into a saving light-heartedness. They may anchor their conscience to responsibility, but also they keep an eye on a Polaris and hold themselves ready to

. . . set sail and steer once more  
For fairer landfall on some nobler shore,

and hopes and expectations saved them.

Here is the delicate side, quite free from sentimentality:

#### A POET'S WELCOME TO HIS LOVE-BEGOTTEN DAUGHTER

Thou's welcome, wean! Mishanter fa' me, (child, mishap)  
If thoughts o' thee or yet thy mammie  
Shall ever daunt me or awe me, (discourage)

My sweet, wee lady,  
Or if I blush when thou shalt ca' me  
Tyta or daddie!

What tho' they ca' me fornicator,  
An' tease my name in kintra clatter?  
The mair they talk, I'm kend the better;  
E'en let them clash! (gossip)  
An auld wife's tongue's a feckless matter. (trifling)  
To gie ane fash. (annoyance)

Welcome, my bonie, sweet, wee dochter!  
Tho' ye come here a wee unsought for,  
And tho' your comin' I hae fought for,  
    Baith kirk and queir;  
Yet, by my faith, ye're no unwrought for—  
    That I shall swear!

Sweet fruit o' monie a merry dint,  
My funny toil is no a' tint: (lost)  
Tho' thou cam to the warl' asklent, (irregularly)  
    Which fools may scoff at,  
In my last plack thy part's be in't (smallest of coins)  
    The better half o't.

Tho' I should be the waur bestead,  
Thou's be as braw and bienly clad, (warmly)  
And thy young years as nicely bred  
    Wi' education,  
As onie brat o' wedlock's bed  
    In a' thy station.

Wee image o' my bonie Betty,  
As fatherly I kiss and daut thee,  
As dear and near my heart I set thee,  
    Wi' as guid will,  
As a' the priests had seen me get thee  
    That's out o' Hell.

Gude grant that thou may ay inherit  
Thy mither's looks an' gracefu' merit,  
An' thy poor, worthless daddie's spirit  
    Without his failins!  
'Twill please me mair to see thee heir it  
    Than stocket mailins. / (farms)

And if thou be what I wad hae thee,  
An' tak the counsel I shall gie thee,  
I'll never rue my trouble wi' thee—  
    The cost nor shame o't—  
But be a loving father to thee,  
    And brag the name o't.

As for the child, which Betty was unable to care for, Burns' mother and sisters raised it, and seem to have been very happy to receive it, in the wholesome fashion of simple, unsophisticated folk. When Betty Burns attained her majority she was given two hundred pounds as a marriage-portion, that being a fund subscribed by Burns' friends. Presently she married a John Bishop and died at the age of thirty-two.

But mark this. While the Peggy affair was under way, in the summer of 1784, Rab the Ranter, fleeing from the care and dreariness of the farm, consoled himself with the Mauchline girls, and tells of it in rhyme not a whit superior to rhyming that has been done by Tom, Dick and Harry in love since the world began.

In Mauchline there dwells six proper young belles,  
The pride of the place and its neighbourhood a',  
Their carriage and dress, a stranger would guess,  
In London or Paris they'd gotten it a'.

Miss Miller is fine, Miss Markland's divine,  
Miss Smith she has wit, and Miss Betty is braw;  
There's beauty and fortune to get wi' Miss Morton,  
But Armour's the jewel for me o' them a'.

(“The Belles of Mauchline”)

And so Jean Armour swims into view and to her the poet refers in his “Epistle to Davie”; refers prettily, ardently, with no suspicion of intrusive anxieties connected with the Peggy affair.

But tent me, Davie, ace o' hearts! (attend to me)  
(To say aught less would wrang the cartes, (cards)  
And flatt'ry I detest)  
This life has joys for you and I;  
And joys that riches ne'er could buy,  
And joys the very best.

There's a' the pleasure o' the heart,  
The lover an' the frien':  
Ye hae your Meg, your dearest part,  
And I my darling Jean!  
It warms me, it charms me,  
To mention but her name;  
It heats me, it beets me, (kindles)  
An' sets me a' on flame.

O all ye Pow'rs who rule above!  
O Thou whose very self art love!  
Thou know'st my words sincere!  
The life-blood streaming thro' my heart,  
Or my more dear immortal part,  
Is not more fondly dear!  
When heart-corroding care and grief  
Deprive my soul of rest,  
Her dear idea brings relief,  
And solace to my breast,  
Thou Being, All-seeing,  
O hear my fervent pray'r;  
Still take her, and make her  
Thy most peculiar care!

As poetry the "Epistle" is not a brilliant performance and there are disconcerting lines, that "you and I" to make the fastidious shudder, but there is full expression of love for Jean.

You see the jewel Jean, a girl of scarce eighteen, at a dance on the evening of the Mauchline races. You see her bright-eyed and with a flush on her cheek, lithe as a whip, in short kilted skirt and plaid stockings, a girl in the flush of youthful health with a glory of waving hair. You see her dancing in the reel, full of action, always laughing, a picture of joy with white flashing teeth and left hand poised on hip and right hand raised, her chin lifted high, a picture of heedlessness and easy



light-heartedness, exactly the eupeptic kind to awaken affection. You see Rab the Ranter, his eyes on Jean, following her everywhere, happy in knowing the beauty and fullness of life, glad to forget the farm and its cares and all the bewildering complexities of it. You see him with eyes bright and shining because here, though only for an hour, life was worthy to be lived and nearness to jewel Jean was a new delight. And following Rab the Ranter, as best it could, went Luath the collie, wary of men's clumsy feet, offended and disgusted with the folly of mortals but tolerating all because the master saw fit to be there. It was a wondering dog, a watchful dog, a silently protesting dog. "If," said Rab the Ranter, within hearing of Jean, "if I could get a lassie to care for me as well as my dog, kind an' cannie, the whole warld might gae tapsalteerie for me." Jean heard, and Jean laughed, and Jean danced away with her partner.

Now Jean's father was a master builder well enough to do, whose house lay close to the Whitford Arms Inn where the Bachelor's club held their meetings, so Robert Burns must needs pass that way. But Rab the Ranter would be no good catch for Jean in the eyes of Master Armour, this fellow of twenty-six or thereabouts, with none too good a reputation if whispers were to be believed, much given to flererin among the lassies, and with a farm on the edge of failing.

But one day Jean happened to be bleaching clothes on the green, going back and forth with the watering can, sprinkling the linen, singing softly as she worked, and doing all that had to be done with subtle grace while the golden shafts of sunshine that pierced the leafy roof made arabesques on her dress and her face and hair. Then, strolling, came Rab the Ranter, his collie at his

heels, and what must the dog do but run towards the girl to the great danger of sun-bleached linen. So Rab whistled and called, and smiled too, and then Jean asked: "Have ye fa'n in wi' a lass yet to like you as weel as your dog?" Then they fell to talk until Jean's sister Nellie called, because she had no liking for Rab the Ranter. But that meeting stood out clearly in the sister's memory.

Said she, years after, to the editor of the *Lowell Morning Times*:

D'ye see Tam McClennan's spout over the gate there? Well, it was juist there whaur Rab an' Jean first foregather't. Her an' me had been gaen there for a gang o' water, an' I had fill't my can first, an' come ower here juist whaur you an' me's stan'in. When Jean was fillin' her stoups Rab Burns cam up, an' began some nonsense or ither wi' her, an' they talked and laugh sae laud that it made me juist mad; to think too that she should hae a word to say wi' sic a lowse character as Rab Burns. When she at last cam' ower I gied her a guid hecklin, trowth. Said I: "Jean, ye ocht to think black-burnin' shame o' yersel. Before bein' seen daffin wi' Rab Burns, woman, I would rather been seen speakin' to a sodger."

But, opposing forces or not, there was Rab's heart aflame, and there was the poet determined to tell freely of what he loved, giving in verse the inner and finer life. Out of that presently grew "Of a' the Airts the Wind Can Blaw," and "O Were I on Parnassus Hill," and "I'll Aye Ca' in by Yon Town," lyrics that have stirred an army of men, especially those whose fortunes have driven them into untamed and lawless lands.

Now comes a time of muddle and trouble, of most

miserable condition where the farm is concerned, of silly argument in the case of the rival sects, of we know not what in the love affairs of Robert Burns. As to the last, biographers have tried to dig and drill, to sort and to sift, to get down to bed rock with the idea of giving the world facts that if given would be little more than silly gossip, but there are affairs that have eluded them. Naturally so, Burns was a man to let his light shine out where necessary, but there were intimacies into which it was, and is, the business of nobody to peer.

While Burns and Jean wandered, looking into one another's eyes while the farm ran to ruin, the poet's brain worked like a smooth-running dynamo. Poems were produced, the satirical narrative poem "Death and Doctor Hornbrook" launched at a school teacher who had turned quack doctor and who according to Burns killed more than he cured; "The Twa Herds," so full of rich contempt for the warring religious sects, to read which would suffice to give any reasonable man more sound satisfaction than acres of dismal stuff produced by gentlemen of the pen who wage a battle against an enemy as old as mankind; "Hallowe'en," all humor, a mine for the student of folklore and ancient customs; "The Cotter's Saturday Night" with its splendid hope for humanity; "Address to the Deil" with its untroubled faith in common sense; "To a Mouse," richest example of sentiment without sentimentality; "Holy Willie's Prayer," a rapier thrust against the pernicious crowd that set itself to chide and judge and denounce and persecute in church sessions for infractions of law made by narrow minds; "The Holy Fair," to be relished by any man who has been saddened at the ranting crew who talk

about God as if they had held private converse with Him behind the barn. I omit mention of a hundred minor pieces. In the early part of 1786 came a new quickening. You must see him privately worried. You see him sitting in the church, his eye suddenly lighting upon "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." The drone of the preacher would go on and on, hopelessly monotonous, his theme far from things human, and the poet's mind would be torn with fear and the expectation of grief to come, and also with affection and sympathy. What a tawdry Gethsemane it was that the preacher could paint when the poet sitting with the Bible on his knees passed through a thousand secret fires and bearing a burden none could see.

Gie him strong drink, until he wink,  
That's sinking in despair;  
An' liquor guid to fire his bluid,  
That's prest wi' grief an' care;

There let him bouse, an' deep carouse,  
Wi' bumpers flowing o'er,  
Till he forgets his loves or debts,  
An' minds his griefs no more.

"Let the whole tangle go," I imagine him saying. But with incredible swiftness his mind would leap to other spheres, and he would be imagining himself as he would be, free from the petty and mean things of life. So probably came "The Bard's Epitaph." For in every written line of it I see the shadow of Jean.

Is there a whim-inspired fool,  
 Owre fast of thought, owre hot for rule,  
 Owre blate to seek, owre proud to snool?—

Let him draw near;  
 And owre this grassy heap sing dool,  
 And drap a tear.

Is there a Bard of rustic song,  
 Who, noteless, steals the crowds among,  
 That weekly this area throng?

O, pass not by!  
 But with a frater-feeling strong,  
 Here, heave a sigh.

Is there a man whose judgment clear  
 Can others teach the course to steer,  
 Yet runs, himself, life's mad career  
 Wild as the wave?—  
 Here pause—and, thro' the starting tear,  
 Survey this grave.

The poor inhabitant below  
 Was quick to learn and wise to know,  
 And keenly felt the friendly glow  
 And softer flame;  
 But thoughtless follies laid him low,  
 And stain'd his name.

Reader, attend! whether thy soul  
 Soars Fancy's flights beyond the pole,  
 Or darkling grubs this earthly hole  
 In low pursuit;  
 Know, prudent, cautious, self-control  
 Is wisdom's root.

Again I see the shadow of love-engendered worry in that stanza, the sixth, in "The Epistle to a Young Friend," which shallow people have seized upon as evidence of insincerity and hypocrisy. For it is nothing of

the kind. It is, obviously enough, sad experience talking to inexperience.

. . . never tempt th' illicit rove (attempt...roving)  
 Tho' naething should divulge it;  
 I waive the quantum of the sin,  
 The hazard of concealing;  
 But och! it hardens a' within,  
 And petrifies the feeling!

I cannot help but find that overhanging shadow in his "Address to the Unco Guid," or "The Rigidly Righteous." What is it indeed but a plea for an understanding charity? What is it but a protest against narrowness? What can it be but a confession to the world?

Ye high, exhalted virtuous dames,  
 Tied up in goodly laces,  
 Before ye gie poor Frailty names,  
 Suppose a change o' cases:  
 A dear-lov'd lad, convenience snug,  
 A treach'rous inclination—  
 But let me whisper i' your lug,  
 Ye're aiblins nae temptation.

Then gently scan your brother man,  
 Still gentler sister woman;  
 Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,  
 To step aside is human:  
 One point must still be greatly dark,  
 The moving *why* they do it;  
 And just as lamely can ye mark  
 How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone  
 Decidedly can try us:  
 He knows each chord, its various tone,  
 Each spring, its various bias:



Then at the balance let's be mute,  
 We never can adjust it;  
 What's done we partly may compute,  
 But know not what's resisted.

"The Twa Dogs," also produced about the same time, is certainly not a poem influenced by that shadow of grief. It belongs to the other Burns, the man in full and heady revolt against poverty. But I try to read nothing into Burns that is not there when I find that cry of grief for a tender thing spoiled, in his poem "To a Mountain Daisy." The flower is symbolical of Jean's or any other woman's affair. And it seems so true as almost to be platitudinous that man has always dealt in poetic symbols of obvious sort. What else are all those proverbs and sayings and parables in miniature which are so common among simple people? Vastly more than the fate of the flower was in the man's heart when he sang,

Wee modest crimson-tippèd flower,  
 Thou's met me in an evil hour;  
 For I maun crush amang the stoure (must...dust)  
                   Thy slender stem;  
 To spare thee now is past my pow'r,  
                   Thou bonie gem.

. . . . .

Such is the fate of artless maid,  
 Sweet flow'ret of the rural shade!  
 By love's simplicity betrayèd,  
                   And guileless trust;  
 Till she, like thee, all soil'd is laid  
                   Low i' the dust.

Such is the fate of simple Bard,  
On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd  
Unskilful he to note the card  
Of prudent lore,  
Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,  
And whelm him o'er.

Tyrant fate had the man by the throat, that is clear.  
In his heart raged a conflict and the end was dark.  
Doubts and difficulties beset him, and those of a kind  
far beyond the ken of kirk-sessions. Life seemed to  
stretch before him barren and weary. That must be plain  
to anyone who reads the poem with understanding.

Still thou are blest compar'd wi' me!  
The present only toucheth thee;  
But och! I backward cast my e'e  
On prospects drear!  
An' forward tho' I canna see,  
I guess and fear.

Soon enough came part of the trouble he feared, the  
coarser and ignoble part. That melancholy body, the  
kirk-sessions, took up the matter in grotesque fashion  
and in the records we get glimpses and hints of hard  
indifference to affection. It is a body of tormentors and  
self-appointed inquisitors.

April 2nd, 1786.—The session being informed  
that Jean Armour, an unmarried woman, is said to  
be with child, and that she has gone off from the  
place of late, to reside elsewhere, the session think it  
their duty to enquire. . . . But appoint James Lamie  
and William Fisher to speak to the parents.

April 9th, 1786.—James Lamie reports that he  
spoke to Mary Smith, mother to Jean Armour, who  
told him that she did not suspect her daughter to be  
with child, that she was gone to Paisley to see her  
friends, and would return soon.

June 18th, 1786.—Jean Armour, called, com-  
 peared not, but sent a letter directed to the minister:

“I am heartily sorry that I have given and must  
 give your session trouble on my account. I acknowl-  
 edge that I am with child, and Robert Burns in Moss-  
 giel is the father. I am, with great respect, your most  
 humble servant,

(signed) Jean Armour.

Mauchline, 13th June, 1786.”

Another and completing record, in the poet's slow,  
 cumbrous handwriting in the family Bible runs:

Robt Burns was born at Alloway in the parish of  
 Ayr—Jany 25th 1759—Jean Armour his wife was  
 born at Mauchline, Feby 27th 1767—Sept 3, 1786  
 were born to them twins, Robert their eldest son, at  
 a quarter past noon & Jean, since dead at fourteen  
 months old. . . .

But long before the birth of the twins the storm had  
 broken, and Burns' brother Gilbert, unemotional and  
 always level-headed, states the facts as he knows them.

The Gilbert account runs:

When, therefore, the result of the connection be-  
 tween Jean and my brother could no longer be con-  
 cealed, Robert durst not engage with his family in his  
 poor unsettled state, but was anxious to shield his  
 partner, by every means in his power, from the con-  
 sequences of their imprudence. It was agreed therefore  
 between them, that they should make a legal ac-  
 knowledgment of an irregular and private marriage;  
 that he should go to Jamaica to push his fortune; and  
 that she should remain with her father till it might  
 please Providence to put the means of supporting a  
 family in his power.

Mrs. Burns (Jean) was a great favorite of her

father's. The intimation of a marriage was the first suggestion he received of her real situation. He was in greatest distress, and fainted away. The marriage did not appear to him to make the matter better. A husband in Jamaica appeared to him and his wife little better than none, and an effectual bar to any other prospects of a settlement in life that their daughter might have. They therefore expressed a wish to her, that the written papers which respected the marriage should be cancelled, and thus the marriage rendered void. In her melancholy state, she felt the deepest remorse at having brought such heavy affliction on parents that loved her so tenderly, and submitted to their entreaties. Their wish was mentioned to Robert. He felt deepest anguish of mind. He offered to stay at home, and provide for his wife and family in the best manner that his daily labors could provide for them, that being the only means in his power. Even this offer they did not approve of; for humble as Miss Armour's station was, and great though her imprudence had been, she still, in the eyes of her partial parents, might look to a better connection than that with my friendless and unhappy brother, at that time without house or bidding place.

You get an idea of the way the poet looked at Jean, and understand what his emotions were at the prospect of leaving Scotland in his "The Farewell."

Farewell, old Scotia's bleak domains,  
Far dearer than the torrid plains,  
Where rich ananas blow! (pineapples or bananas)  
Farewell, a mother's blessing dear,  
A brother's sigh! a sister's tear!  
My Jean's heart-rending throe!  
Farewell my Bess! tho' thou'rt bereft  
Of my paternal care.

A faithful brother I have left.  
 My part in him thou'lt share!  
 Adieu too, to you too,  
 My Smith, my bosom frien':  
 When kindly you mind me,  
 O then befrien' my Jean!

What bursting anguish tears my heart;  
 From thee, my Jeany, must I part?

Thou weeping, answ'rest—"No!"

Alas! misfortune stares my face,  
 And points to ruin and disgrace,

I for thy sake must go!

Thee Hamilton, and Aiken dear,

A grateful warm adieu!

I, with a much indebted tear.

Shall still remember you!

All hail then, the gale then.

Wafts me from thee, dear shore!

It rustles, and whistles—

I'll never see them more!

It is homely enough, to be sure, but important as showing the state of the man's feelings. He is nothing more than a simple, uncomplicated being, almost heartbroken at the prospect of leaving his native land.

As for the Burns' point of view regarding separation from Jean, we get that in a letter written to a David Brice which has been printed in a mutilated form by one or two, but runs, in its entirety, as follows:

I received your message by G. Paterson, and as I am very throng (busy) at present, I just write to let you know that there is such a worthless, rhyming reprobate as your humble servant still in the land of the living, though I can scarcely say in the place of hope. I have no news to tell you that will give me any pleasure to mention, or you to hear.

Poor ill-advised, ungrateful Armour came home on Friday last. You have heard all the particulars of that affair, and a black affair it is. What she thinks of her conduct now, I don't know; one thing I know—she has made myself completely miserable. Never man loved, or rather adored, a woman more than I did her; and, to confess truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all, though I won't tell her so if I see her, which I don't want to do. My poor dear unfortunate Jean! how happy have I been in her arms! It is not the losing her that makes me so unhappy, but for *her* sake I feel most severely: I foresee she was in the road to—I am afraid—*eternal* ruin. And those who made so much noise, and showed so much grief, at the thought of her being *my wife* may some day see her connected in such a manner as may give them more real cause for vexation. I am sure I do not wish it. May Almighty God forgive her ingratitude and perjury to me, as I from my very soul forgive her; and may His grace be with her, to bless her in all her future life! I can have no nearer idea of the place of eternal punishment than what I have felt in my own breast on her account. I have tried often to forget her: I have run into all kinds of dissipation and riot, mason-meetings, drinking-matches, and other mischief, to drive her out of my head, but all in vain. And now for a grand cure: the ship is on her way home that is to take me out to Jamaica; and then, farewell dear old Scotland! and farewell, dear, ungrateful Jean! for never, never will I see you more.

You will have heard that I am going to commence poet in print; and tomorrow my works go to the press. I expect it will be a volume about two hundred pages—it is the last foolish action I intend to do; then turn a wise man as soon as possible.

The passage about Jean carries its own story between



the lines. You imagine Burns all at sea, not knowing how things were going with her; hearing all manner of rumors published by a hundred whispering tongues that poison truth. You see him the hearer of a dozen fantastic stories; threatened with imprisonment, the farm nearly on the point of ruin; himself without money. For he had given Jean a paper of acknowledgment constituting a legal but irregular marriage by Scottish law, but Jean's father would have none of that so he persuaded Jean to give up the paper, then he destroyed it. Looking upon Burns as a rascal and ruffian, a ne'er-do-well and a failure, he could not see how a union between such a one and his daughter could be in any way desirable, and preventing a union there would be a better chance for Jean. And considering the poet in that unfavorable light, Jean's father did no more than accept Robert Burns at the estimate he placed on himself, in his self-derogatory moods. "The great misfortune of my life was never to have an aim," was the way he wrote of himself in his autobiography. There is also the passage in the letter to James Smith in which he calls himself a "rhyming, mason-making, rattling, aimless, idle fellow."

So there seems nothing to look forward to in Scotland, and the only hope lies in going to a new land where he can start afresh, known by nobody and knowing no one. Yet, such was the buoyancy of the healthy-bodied young fellow that he could thrust aside resolutely, or at least make a gesture of thrusting aside his worry. "I have subsided into the time-settled sorrow of the sable widower, who, wiping away the decent tear lifts up his grief worn eye to look for—another wife," he wrote.

But the fare to Jamaica, the land he intended to choose, would take nine pounds at the least, which was nine pounds more than Burns possessed. Then came Gilbert his brother, and a Dr. Blacklock, the latter a blind poet living in Edinburgh, and between the two of them they persuaded Robert to do what could be done in the way of turning his poems into cash. So there came about the gathering up of manuscript and, presently, the writing of a preface in which the poet let it be known, "once for all, that he certainly looks upon himself as possest of some poetic abilities," though he would always remain modest before Ramsay and Ferguson, "two justly admired Scotch poets he had in his eye . . . but rather with a view to kindle at their flame than for servile imitation." So the manuscript went to Kilmarnock, Jean was sent to Paisley by her parents, and, biographers say, Robert Burns turned for consolation to Highland Mary.

Now Highland Mary is a mystery. Reading any biography about Burns I find myself walking firmly on solid ground, with every personage mentioned properly human and creditable, until I come to Highland Mary and then I am nowhere. Other women are flesh and blood, heartiness and warmth, but Mary is a ghost. All characters mentioned toil, and love, and quarrel and fight, and drink, and do all that is demanded of human beings, but in Highland Mary I can discern no human qualities, that is, when I look for her in the many letters that Burns wrote and received, or in references made by contemporaries of Burns. A mist of doubt hangs about her. No one seems to know her positively, although, as

everyone must understand, the neighborhood that Burns traversed was restricted and everyone living in it knew everyone else. You find no mention made of her by Burns in his autobiography, although that is a frank and full account of his life up to the time he went to Edinburgh. She has been identified with a Mary Campbell, and, says the biographer Chambers, "It is not unlikely that he [Burns] visited her relations at Greenock." "Not unlikely," you will mark. Then comes this fragment of romantic coloring without a shadow of anything real to sustain it: "Imagination fondly pauses to behold him stretched on her grave in the West Kirkyard, bewailing her untimely severance from his arms." But my imagination does nothing of the kind when I read Burns' letters of that period. Then comes Robert Louis Stevenson who accepts her as "an innocent and gentle Highland nursery maid at service in a neighboring family," and, later, R. L. S. tells prettily how

Jean's marriage lines had not been destroyed till March 13, 1786; yet all was settled between Burns and Mary Campbell by Sunday, May 14, when they met for the last time, and said farewell with rustic solemnity upon the banks of Ayr. They each wet their hands in the stream, and, standing one on either bank, held a Bible between them as they vowed eternal faith. Then they exchanged Bibles, on one of which Burns, for greater security, had inscribed texts as to the binding nature of an oath; and surely if ceremony can do aught to fix the wandering affections, here were two people united for life.

But where is the evidence of all that? Where is there evidence in the letters written by Burns of any first meeting with Mary, as we have accounts of first meetings of

every other of his loves? "Strangely enough," says George Gerbie, "her name does not occur once in all his [Burns'] correspondence."

The truth is, there is nothing definite anywhere, in correspondence or first hand record, and wherever you touch Highland Mary you find, "It may be supposed," "The popular supposition is," "It cannot be doubted that," and so on. If Robert Burns stood accused of murdering one known as Highland Mary there could not be adduced enough documentary evidence to try, much less to convict him. But looking at the problem with a clear eye, remembering that there is no actual, irrefutable evidence to connect Highland Mary with any known woman, it would seem that Robert Burns penniless, with affairs to clear up, and with other affairs to commence because of the voyage to the West Indies, with a volume of poems in the press and proofs to read and other urgent matters connected therewith, with every man, woman and kirk-elder suspicious of him, with Master Armour watching him with baleful eye, with a recent lesson that sat heavily upon him for the time however soon he forgot it, and be it borne in mind, still in love with Jean—it would seem that with all that and more Robert Burns would have his hands too full to engage in new affairs.

Still there are the poems asking Mary to go with him overseas; there is Burns singing sweetly enough later of Mary in Heaven, there is the poem entitled "Lament," in which he addresses "the cold fruitless moon" in a manner not common with Burns, but I think sincere in his regret for the lost Jean.

Encircled in her clasping arms,  
 How have the raptur'd moments flown!  
 How have I wished for Fortune's charms,  
 For her dear sake and hers alone!  
 And, must I think it! is she gone,  
 My secret heart's exulting boast?  
 And does she heedless hear my groan?  
 And is she ever, ever lost?

O! can she bear so base a heart,  
 So lost to honor, lost to truth,  
 As from the fondest lover part,  
 The plighted husband of her youth?  
 Alas! Life's path may be unsmooth!  
 Her way may lie thro' rough distress!  
 Then, who her pangs and pains will soothe,  
 Her sorrows share, and make them less?

But the poem must be read. Nor will any read without coming to full realization of the grief because of loss that possessed the poet. For it must be understood, as Burns saw it he had lost Jean forever, and the destruction of the paper marked the death of his hopes.

The mystery of Highland Mary is as amusing as a detective story told by an amateur with no power of verisimilitude. I turn to the Aldine edition of the "British Poets," more particularly to the "Memoir" by George A. Aitken, and Aitken stands the shadow of a mighty name where Burns is concerned; but on page xxxvii I find that the song "Afton Water," on which hangs so much of the Highland Mary incident, was said by Dr. Currie, in 1801, to refer to Mrs. Stewart of Stair. But Gilbert Burns stepped in and said: "Dr. Currie is misinformed, but he must not be contradicted," though why an error should not be contradicted is not made clear.



To make the matter still more involved, when Currie's Burns was republished, twenty years later, Gilbert Burns allowed the not-to-be-contradicted but erroneous note to appear yet made no comment. "Afton Water" then, according to that, must remain a poem referring to Mrs. Stewart and not to Highland Mary. Meanwhile the good Dr. Currie was empowered to say, by the family, that

The bank of the Ayr formed the scene of youthful passions of a still tenderer nature, the history of which would be improper to reveal, were it even in one's power, and the traces of which will soon be discoverable only in those strains of nature and sensibility to which they give birth.

Obviously someone in the background was building up a romantic situation with a leading gentleman and a leading lady, but its condition of indigestibility prevented details. It was Cromek who first told the story of the lovers "standing on each side of a small purling brook," "laving their hands in its limpid stream" and so on, and Aitken, trying to account for the tale, says that "probably" Cromek had his information from Mrs. Burns. But who would have looked for "purling brooks" and "limpid streams" in a story told by plain Jean? Master Aitken's "probabilities" run thickly. Highland Mary, he says, "was 'probably' born at Campbelltown." "She was 'probably' a dairymaid." "The parting 'probably' occurred on the Mauchline Burn." Then in a footnote, in which appear many coincident dates relating to Mary Campbell and Robert Burns, Aitken says, "There would seem to be a strong presumption that this Mary Campbell . . . is the same person as Highland Mary." So at last the situation is rounded and complete and fit



for digestion, and what V. Stefansson has called "truth by definition" is established. John Campbell Shairp, writing in the English Men of Letters Series, accepts the Mary Campbell story, so the incident takes its place with other interesting tales which, for school children, make pleasant oases in deserts of dry facts; Alfred and the cakes, Tell and the apple, Pershing saying, "Here we are, LaFayette," Washington and the cherry tree, the angel at Mons, Columbus' sailors fearing the ship would fall over the edge of the world, Cleopatra melting a pearl in vinegar or wine, President Harding dying of a broken heart.

But Robert Chambers would have none of that Mary Campbell and went to the records of the kirk-sessions of Dundonald parish in exploratory mood, a little incensed, it would seem, because Professor Nichol of Glasgow University had burst into enthusiastic speech, praising Highland Mary as "the white rose" that "grew up and blossomed in the midst of his [Burns'] passion flowers." Robert Chambers copied this:

1784. April 25.—Mary Campbell, an unmarried woman, also appeared before the Session, and confessed she had brought forth a child in the parish of Mauchline. She was sessionally rebuked and exhorted to repentance, and being interrogate who was the father of her child answered John Hay in Paulstone, and that she resided in this parish when the guilt was committed. The Session appointed Mr. Duncan (the minister) to write John Hay of this other accusation, and to desire his answer thereto.

1784. May 2.—Same day Mr. Duncan reported that he had wrote John Hay and had received his answer, which was read and appointed to be insert

in the Minutes—the tenor whereof follows: “Paulstone, May 1st, 1784,—Sir—yours of the 27th April I received intimates me that Mary Campbell had appeared in your Session and charged me as the father of her child. That I entirely deny as I never had anything to do with her that way. I am, Sir, your most humble servant (signed John Hay). Directed thus: The Revnd. Mr. Robert Duncan, Dundonald.”

1784. May 9.—Same day Mary Campbell appeared before the Session, and upon hearing the Minutes of the last Session read, still persisted in her accusation of John Hay as the father of her child. Being interrogate if she could produce any presumption to fix the guilt upon him, declared that she had received money from him at two different times for the maintenance of her and the child to the amount of ten shillings each time, and further declares that Mr. Hay said to her that he would give her money to help up with the child, but that he would not take with it publicly; being further asked if she had any witnesses to produce to verify these assertions, answered she had none. The Session considering the above affair, delay doing anything more about it till further light could be given anent it, as it appears to them only a bare accusation.

1786. Feb. 26.—The Session, understanding that the Justices of the Peace have ordained John Hay to pay four pounds ster. yearly to Mary Campbell for the maintenance of the child she has laid to his charge, and as she now resides in the parish of Stair, agree to transfer the cognisance of that scandal as to her to the Kirk-session of Stair, who will please to take the said Mary Campbell under discipline for her guilt of fornication with John Hay, and absolve her therefrom according to the rules of this Church, and appoint their clerk to send a copy of their Minutes to the Revnd. Mr. John Steel, Minister of Stair.

1787. Dec. 17.—John Hay voluntarily confessed fornication with Janet Siller and Mary Campbell and also with Euphan Bowie from the New Town of Ayr, and the father of a child brought forth by each of them, and also confessed fornication with Margaret Ceurdie and Agnes M'Cletchie, formerly confessed by him. The Sess. appointed him to confess publicly any date he pleased.

So one seems to run up a blind alley in that direction seeking an ideal creature of purity in that particular Mary Campbell. But what is the guess worth that it was Mary Campbell, or any Mary, or indeed any living creature?

No. I cannot bring myself to believe in Highland Mary composed of all those wraith-like films. But I can see Robert Burns inventing Highland Mary, an entirely fictional personage designed to bring Jean to his side again, perhaps the workings of jealousy, or because of an awakened rivalry. He invented an Anna, in a song on which he set great store, when no Anna was on the horizon, beginning, "Anna, thy charms my bosom fire," when his bosom was not fired at all. So who can tell? Also there is the possibility that a poem which, on the face of it, was addressed to another woman, but which was really intended for Jean, might reach Jean, who otherwise might never see it. And I can see Gilbert Burns and "the family" refusing to let a good story die for the sake of a little added coloring. For me the women of Burns' poetry stand out strongly, well-defined, clear-cut. They live. But Highland Mary and Mary of the invitation to sail with him regarded as newcomers on the stage have no living qualities. For me the appeal is to Jean when the poet sings:

I hae sworn by the Heavens to my Mary,  
 I have sworn by the Heavens to be true;  
 And sae may the Heavens forget me,  
 When I forget my vow.

Oh plight me your faith, my Mary,  
 And plight me your lily-white hand;  
 Oh plight me your faith, my Mary,  
 Before I leave Scotia's strand.

We have plighted our troth, my Mary,  
 In mutual affection to join;  
 And curst be the curse that shall part us!  
 The hour and moment o' time.

That, I say, seems to me to be Burns remembering the girl of the penny dance, Jean bright-eyed, and flushed of cheek, Jean with the glory of waving hair, Jean laughing in her youthful health. It is an appeal to the maid who stood in mixed sunshine and shadow, watering-pot swinging in her hand as she looked at Rab the Ranter of the eyes bright and shining, that lad so given to fletherin among the lassies.

Read the poem with the thought that Jean was dead to him forever.

#### HIGHLAND MARY

Ye banks and braes and streams around  
 The castle o' Montgomery,  
 Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,  
 Your waters never drumlie! (cloudy)  
 There Simmer first unfald her robes,  
 And there they langest tarry!  
 For there I took the last Fareweel  
 O' my sweet Highland Mary!

How sweetly bloom'd the gay, green birk, (birch)  
 How rich the hawthorn's blossom,  
 As underneath their fragrant shade,  
 I clasp'd her to my bosom!  
 The golden Hours on angel wings,  
 Flew o'er me and my Dearie;  
 For dear to me, as light and life  
 Was my sweet Highland Mary.

Wi' mony a vow, and lock'd embrace,  
 Our parting was fu' tender;  
 And, pledging aft to meet again,  
 We tore oursels asunder.  
 But oh! fell Death's untimely frost,  
 That nipt my Flower sae early!  
 Now green's the sod, and cauld's the clay,  
 That wraps my Highland Mary!

O, pale, pale now, those rosy lips  
 I aft hae kiss'd sae fondly;  
 And clos'd for ay, the sparkling glance  
 That dwelt on me sae kindly;  
 And mouldering now in silent dust,  
 That heart that lo'ed me dearly!  
 But still within my bosom's core  
 Shall live my Highland Mary.

But what of the Bible? people say. There it is to be seen by the curious to this day at Ayr. Well, there is a Bible there, and also at Antwerp there are ribs said to have come from a giant, and in Ceylon there is the mark of Adam's foot in a rock, and at Ripley, Ohio, the good folk will show you the steps up which Eliza climbed after she crossed the ice, and (if the personal reference be pardoned) in my "Tales from Silverlands" I refer to rivers and lakes and hills that have been made by invisible creatures of the air, and by genii, and by fairies.



On the fly leaf of the Bible appear broken words, "Ro . . . t Bu . . ." and "Mo . . .," and some writing, copied from Levit. 19th ch: 12 verse. That is in Vol. I. On the fly leaf of Vol. II. is said to be the name Robert Burns, with Mossgiel spelled incorrectly, and writing copied from Matt. 5th chap: 33rd verse. Those two volumes came from Montreal, Canada, and tradition has it that Mary's mother had the Bible from Mary, that Mary erased the names on her death bed by wetting the writing and destroying the paper or something of the kind, that Mary's mother gave the books to Mary's sister who married a man named Anderson who went to New York, then to Canada near Toronto. Anderson fell into evil financial case and sent the Bibles to Montreal together with a lock of Mary's hair and the story of his possession, and some Montreal Burns admirers made up a subscription of twenty-five pounds and forwarded the books to the Provost of Ayr to be deposited in the monument. Men of romantic turn have explained the obliteration of the names in many ways. Scott Douglas has guessed that "in the whirl of excitement which soon followed that Sunday, Burns forgot his vow to poor Mary, and she, heart-sore at his neglect, deleted the names from that touching memorial of their secret betrothal." Some, the hard-headed sort, have whispered the word "fake," and voiced a belief that the relic manufacturer was at work, but, being stumped when it came to locating Mary, achieved a masterly stroke in the erasure.

So we set the mystery of Highland Mary aside with other mysteries, leaving every one to his choice in making decision whether the Bible should or should not be admitted as exhibit in the record. The whole business of



Highland Mary has something of the mistiness of myth and talking about it does not make for solidification.

And now, while Burns' book of poems is in preparation at Kilmarnock, seems the proper time and place to clear up another misunderstanding, or perhaps it would be better to say a complexity, because there have been, and still are, so many apologists for Burns' conduct. Also, in some cases, those who have tried to whitewash Robert Burns seem to have considered it their duty to blackwash the women, trying to make out a case that Jean, for instance, was engaged to another man before she met Burns; that Eileen Begbie was no better than she should be; that Highland Mary, (*vide* Henley), might have been a light-skirts; that Anna Park, (to be met presently), was only a girl at an inn anyway, and so on.

But looking at the business with open eye, you see that Robert Burns, in spite of his amorous adventures, remained a welcome and honored member of his Masonic Lodge and was not tried and expelled for conduct unbecoming a Free and Accepted Mason. You find him, with all his record, "in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas à Kempis or John Bunyan." You will see him received and made much of in Edinburgh; made presently honorary burgess of the town of Dumfries; conferring honors, in the character of Deputy Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge upon such eminents as Professor of Morals, Dugald Stewart, and others; received with open arms by society, and all that, and more, in straight-laced Scotland, country of Knox and Calvin, home of

kirk-sessions and censorious bodies attached to the church. It is a Scotland of educated men and women as compared with England or Ireland of that day. The fact is that there are what might be called divergencies when it comes to viewing moral conduct because the illegitimacy average varies in different countries, also in different parts of the same countries; and where the rate is high, naturally, public sentiment would not be so severe. And it would seem, whatever the cause may be, that the average number of illegitimate children per thousand births in any particular country hardly varies from year to year; so, in a sense, there was something in that boastful statement, made by my school teacher, to the effect that with data given, it becomes possible to make accurate predictions. Taking it by and large, it would be true to say that illegitimacy would be regarded as a more serious thing in Ireland than in England, and more serious in England than in Scotland, and more serious in the Orkney islands than in Perthshire, and more serious in Perthshire than in Ayr, Burns' native county.

It may seem out of the way to stretch the discussion, but if going out of the way anytime and anywhere and under any circumstances will make for a more impersonal view of men and women, authors, poets or common people; if going out of the way will release people from restricting conventions and received opinions, then the detour is worth while. Doubtless today, statistics would reveal a different state of affairs to the statistics I am about to quote, because what is musically called moral delinquency may exist without altering the birth rate appreciably today, and our boasted increase of morality

may be nothing more than trickiness. That, however, is apart from the subject. What is near to it, and also what affords food for thought follows, especially as the figures given extend over a period of years. They are taken from reports made by the Registrar's Office in Somerset House, and I copy them from page 12 of Dr. Leffingwell's study of illegitimacy.

Of each thousand children born in England, Scotland and Ireland, how many were illegitimate?			
<i>Year</i>	<i>Ireland</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
1878	23	47	84
1879	25	48	85
1880	25	48	85
1881	25	49	83
1882	27	49	83
1883	26	48	81
1884	27	47	81
1885	28	48	85
1886	27	47	82
1887	28	48	83
1888	29	46	81
1889	28	46	79

If that unbroken regularity does not hold indications of some law at work which we do not understand, then I am all at sea. And similar regularity is indicated when county records are taken for examination. Ayr, Burns' county, comes under a tabulated head of Scottish counties having an illegitimate rate of slightly under ten per cent. A ten-year period, beginning at 1876, shows it to have

a steady average of seventy-six children per thousand of illegitimate birth. You perceive the regularity, even as there is regularity in the tides and in the seasons, and in the phases of the moon. So I drop the subject without drawing cynical conclusions and without advancing any theories. The statistics are enough to show that these are inexplicable sociological phenomena. In the face of such, it is a fool who sets himself up to judge and to denounce.

## PART IV

### The Shock of Naturalism

JOHN WILSON of Kilmarnock brought out for Burns his small book of thirty-six poems,—“Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect,” said the title page. The actual financing, in the way of getting subscriptions for copies, was done by Burns’ friends Gavin Hamilton, Aiken, Ballantyne, Parker and one or two others.

At once the book became a “local success,” and the six hundred copies that formed the edition were absorbed. Praise ran high, Burns’ share of the monies ran to twenty pounds, and future prospects may be measured by the economic gauge with the fact borne in mind that the printer refused to venture on a second edition unless the cost of the paper was forthcoming, such cost estimated at twenty-seven pounds. Yet there was the noise of praise, and Master Robert Heron, author of a “History of Scotland” and also of a “Life of Burns,” tells us that “old and young, high and low, grave and gay, learned and ignorant, all were alike delighted, agitated, transported.” He adds,

The plough-boys and maid-servants would have gladly bestowed the wages which they earned the most hardly, and which they wanted to purchase necessary clothing, if they might but secure the works of Burns.

But bare words buy no barley, and praise without profit puts little in the pot, as the old saws have it. Burns turned his face Jamaica-wards, sent his chest on the road and doubtless found grief turn to smiles when a song

came to his heart, a song of seriousness and earnestness, one of the best of his pieces not in the vernacular, I think.

This is half of it, the last half:

'Tis not the surging billows' roar,  
'Tis not that fatal, deadly shore;  
Tho' death in ev'ry shape appear.  
The wretched have no more to fear;  
But round my heart the ties are bound,  
That heart transpierc'd with many a wound;  
These bleed afresh, those ties I tear,  
To leave the bonnie banks of Ayr.

Farewell, old Coila's hills and dales.  
Her healthy moors and winding vales;  
The scenes where wretched Fancy roves,  
Pursuing past unhappy loves!  
Farewell my friends! farewell my foes!  
My peace with these, my love with those—  
The bursting tears my heart declare,  
Farewell my bonnie banks of Ayr.

That sincere farewell to things consecrated by use and joy and grief, too, is known to many thousands of Scots who regard with something like scorn the English songs of Burns; Scots in the Rockies of Canada, in the sheep-lands of Australia, in the Argentine, in New Zealand and in the Falklands and in Africa. It shares a place with Moore's "Vale of Avoca." But perhaps it is difficult for those who have not left the place of their birth to understand how so simple a song could stir the hearts of expatriate men, the sort you might suspect of emotional poverty.

Meanwhile things were at work to keep Burns in Scotland, as presently shall be seen. Also meanwhile there was the little book with its local fame and local trumpeters, and, south beyond the Tyne lay the book market



and London-town's critics at whose nod or frown the book and its poet would live or die. And of all the poets then living whose word was law, William Cowper stood first and foremost.

Now someone carried a copy of the book to the English poet soon after its publication. To get the real spirit of the incident you must see Cowper in his sheltered garden at Olney, a man very quiet and orderly, conventional to primness, in his fifty-sixth year, and of that temper to have kept at arm's length the rough and tumble of life, mistrusting its texture as cruel and coarse. Also you must see him as touched with a glow of serious happiness because of his own newly published and highly successful effort, a series of essays in verse called "The Task," all about unimportant incidents of country life. Picture him polite, urbane, easily conversational in a polished way, and quite without stiffness of affectation.

He opened the book of poetry, read a little here and there, shook his head in puzzlement, tried again at another page, hoping for pleasure in store. One is impelled to speculation as to the passages upon which his eye fell.

Suppose he chanced to hit upon this from the poem, "A Dedication":

Morality, thou deadly bane,  
Thy tens of thousands thou hast slain!  
Vain is his hope, whase stay an' trust is,  
In moral mercy, truth and justice!

No—stretch a point to catch a plack;  
Abuse a brother to his back;  
Steal thro' the winnock frae a whore,  
But point the rake that taks the door;  
Be to the poor like onie whunstane,  
And haud their noses to the grunstone;  
Ply ev'ry art of legal thieving;  
No matter—stick to sound believing.

Or suppose he turned to the poem, the title of which would revolt him. This: "To a Louse, on Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at Church." Or what if his eye had happened to light upon that epitaph entitled "On a Noisy Polemic," which runs

Below thir stanes lie Jamie's banes;  
 O Death, it's my opinion,  
 Thou ne'er took such a bleth'ran bitch,  
 Into thy dark dominion!

Or, as Cowper may well have done, because of the position of the poem in the book, it being the second, suppose he looked first at the poem entitled "Scotch Drink," beginning with this:

Let other poets raise a fracas  
 'Bout vines, and wines, an' druken Bacchus,  
 An' crabbed names an' stories wrack us.

An' grate our lug, <sup>(ear)</sup>  
 I sing the juice Scotch bear can mak us,  
 In glass or jug.

O thou my Muse! guid, auld Scotch Drink!  
 Whether thro' wimplin worms thou jink,  
 Or, richly brown, ream owre the brink,  
 In glorious faem,  
 Inspire me, till I lisp an' wink,  
 To sing thy name! /

. . . . .

O Whisky! Soul o' plays an' pranks!  
 Accept a bardie's gratefu' thanks!  
 When wanting thee, what tuneless cranks  
 Are my poor verses!

Or, as a last supposition, suppose the astonished Cowper, hoping to get to something safe and fit for reading to his circle, had turned to "The Farewell to the Bretheren of St. James Lodge," because it had to do with Free-

masonry, and so chanced upon one of those weak poems of Burns in which his light shines duldest, to read:

Oft have I met your social Band,  
 And spent the cheerful, festive night;  
 Oft honored with supreme command,  
 Presided o'er the *Sons of Light*;  
 And by that *Hieroglyphic bright*,  
 Which none but *Craftsmen* ever saw!  
 Strong Mem'ry on my heart shall write  
 Those happy scenes when far awa!

May Freedom, Harmony and Love  
 Unite you in the *grand Design*.  
 Beneath th' Omniscient Eye above.  
 The glorious *Architect Divine*!  
 That you may keep th' *Unerring Line*,  
 Still rising by the *Plummet's Law*,  
 Till *Order* bright, completely shine,  
 Shall be my Pray'r when far awa.

Such suppositions, and others arise, because after scanning the pages, all that he could find to say was, "Very extraordinary! Very extraordinary, indeed!" To be sure, some time later William Cowper got over the shock and wrote,

And though they be written in a language that is new to me . . . I think them, on the whole, a very extraordinary production. He is, I believe, the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower rank of life since Shakespeare (I should rather say since Prior), who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin, and the disadvantages under which he has laboured.

That criticism much resembles what Henry Mackenzie, author of the "Man of Feeling," had written a little while before, and Mackenzie was looked upon as an

authority because of his contributions to *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*.

But it is the first shock of astonishment that counts, not because of Cowper alone, but because the vast majority of Englishmen fail to comprehend Burns even today. "Scots Wha Hae" and "Auld Lang Syne" and "Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon" comprise the Burns repertoire of the Englishman south of the Mersey and Flamboro Head, though not the repertoire of the Englishman living north of a line drawn between those points. And to a great extent if you think of William Cowper, if you bear in mind his environment and his ideals, you have a notion of the environment and ideals and social habits of respectable England (with a capital R), either as Englishmen of that day and of much later had and held them, or else as they would have others believe they had and held them. You will remember how my school teacher shook his head and regretted "a certain rudeness of conduct" in Burns.

You see then William Cowper with Burns' book, Cowper whose wildest adventures were confined to the fragrant gardens of Olney; and whose circle of acquaintances consisted of ladies and gentle-mannered men, but never by any possibility could include the highly improper characters who gathered at the village inn to drink ale and to sing songs and to tell the sort of stories that men have always told. The Scot and the Englishman had known different aspects of life and each had set down things as he knew them, and so there came for Cowper the shock of collision. And it might be said that sometimes Cowper and other poets set down things in perfect sincerity not as they actually were, but as they thought or imagined they were, in quite honest igno-

rance. Thus, if you will read through Thomas Campbell's narrative poem, "Gertrude of Wyoming," to take an instance of honest but very misleading ignorance, you will find his scene laid in Pennsylvania, but a Pennsylvania teeming with condors and flamingoes, with maidens and their timbrels, with shepherd swains and bison and crocodiles. Yet, be it said, that wholly untrue picture was better received than a true description of Pennsylvania as it actually was, just as today, with us, a film picture of a Wild West as it actually existed would find no box-office, while there would be ready acceptance of an wholly imaginary and impossible Wild West with hero cowboys all incapable of meanness and superb of horsemanship and correct of aim, with villains never of nationality north of the Rio Grande. And it is important to remember that there are today, as there always have been, highly artificial depictions of life in an impossible world of artless simplicity, with good and bad sharply divided.

As to that artificial depiction of life, Cowper himself had made in all innocence and simplicity a poem about Scotland, or more properly, as he supposed, with a Scottish setting, but which was accepted seriously by his English readers although it was as imaginary as the land celebrated in a pastoral where ribboned sheep danced to the piping of dainty shepherds and ribboned shepherdesses. But how different that fantastic Scotland painted by Cowper for drawing-room consumption, from the Scotland Burns knew! How Burns would have roared reading Cowper's description!

In Scotland's realm, where trees are few,  
Nor even shrubs abound;  
But where, however bleak the view,  
Some better things are found;



For husband there and wife may boast  
Their union undefiled,  
And false ones are as rare almost  
As hedgerows in the wild.

But what of the state of Cowper's nerves could he have read the doxy's song as sung at Poosie Nansie's, which, happily for his peace of mind, he could not, for it had not then appeared; and not only the state of Cowper's nerves, but the nerves of all Respectable England. How it would have fluttered the doves who accepted a Scotland with "union undefiled."

I once was a maid, tho' I cannot tell when,  
And still my delight is in proper young men.  
Some one of the troop of dragoons was my daddie:  
No wonder I'm fond of a sodger laddie!

The first of my loves was a swaggering blade:  
To rattle the thundering drum was his trade;  
His leg was so tight, and his cheek was so ruddy,  
Transported I was with my sodger laddie.

But godly old chaplin left him in the lurch;  
The sword I forsook for the sake of the church;  
He risked the soul and I ventured the body;  
'Twas then I prov'd false to my sodger laddie.

Full soon I grew sick of my sanctified sot;  
The regiment at large for a husband I got;  
From the gilded spontoon to the fife I was ready:  
I asked no more but a sodger laddie.

But the Peace it reduc'd me to beg in despair,  
Till I met my old boy in a Cunningham Fair;  
His rags regimental they flutter'd so gaudy:  
My heart it rejoic'd at a sodger laddie.

And now I have liv'd—I know not how long!  
But still I can join in a cup and a song;  
And whilst with both hands I can hold a glass steady  
Here's to thee, my hero, my sodger laddie!

("Jolly Beggars")



How Burns and Cowper were worlds apart can be realized from a passage in a letter written by Cowper to his friend the Rev. John Newton, a reformed rover and rapsallion. The passage runs, “. . . we were sitting after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, . . . one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted.” So you see a good man, all politeness, easily conversational in a polished way as attested by his letters, moving through life without adventures other than spiritual and intellectual. Had Robert Burns dropped into Olney, not as the poet but in his everyday character, then, seeking the company most congenial to his spirit he would never have found the parlor where Cowper sat with the two ladies, so very composedly. It needs not be said that he would have made for the nearest inn, would have called for nut-brown ale, would have engaged the daughter of the house in conversation with eyes bright and shining, would have sought out Hob and Nob and the hostler and made the rafters ring. And, hearing the noise, William Cowper with his attendant ladies would have made a wide circuit to avoid offence to their ears.

As for England, there is ample evidence of the national state of mind where literature is concerned. True, there had been Fielding and Smollett and Sterne, but they, it was generally felt, sinned against the proprieties. Richardson's “Clarissa Harlow” and his “Sir Charles Grandison” were the accepted things. The daintily reserved was the fashion. “Télémaque,” with the word *amitié* substituted for *amour*, represented approved French literature. Burns' satirical poem addressed to the Mauchline belles advising them against novel reading reveals much. Dignity, stateliness, reserve, they were the ideals. Gold-

smith's country parson, Dr. Primrose, found favor and ready acceptance, not as a romantic and impossible picture, but as entirely representative. The literary trend of the nation leaned towards a general acquiescence of conventional thinking much as it does with us here and today. Addison's graceful prose was the model. Pope was looked upon as the poetic model. As for the existence of poverty, by a sort of willful misunderstanding poverty had come to be regarded as a sort of interesting and romantic condition much resembling the picture made by Goldsmith in his "Deserted Village." Poverty of the Hogarthian kind, sordid and dangerous and brutalizing was, obviously, the result of inherent viciousness.

Neither Cowper nor any one of a group of England's writers but would have given Burns the cold shoulder, as the term has it, counting him as one lacking Respectability, as uncouth, as reprehensible in every way, had they seen any one of a hundred of his letters, not the wild, bawdy ones, but the free and easy, dashed-off communications reflecting his mood. Let me take one at random.

To Mr. Robert Cleghorn, Saughton Mills.

I have just bought a quire of post, and I am determined, my dear Cleghorn, to give you the maiden-head of it. Indeed that is all my reason for, and all that I can propose to give you by, this present scrawl. From my late hours last night, and the dripping fogs and damn'd east-wind of this stupid day I have left me as little soul as an oyster—"Sir John, you are so fretful, you cannot live long"—"Why, there is it! Come, sing me a b—dy song to make me merry!!"

Act Sederunt o' The Session.

Tune.—"O'er the muir among the heather."

. . . . .

Well the Law is good for something, since we can make a b—dy song out of it. (N. B.—I never made anything of it any other way.) There is—there must be some truth in original sin. My violent propensity to b—dy convinces me of it. Lack a day! if that species of composition be the special sin, never-to-be-forgiven in this world nor in that which is to come, "I am the most offending soul alive." Mair for token, a fine chiel—a hand-waled friend and crony o' my ain, gat o'er the lugs in love wi' a braw, bonie fodge! hizzie frae the English side, weel-ken'd i' the burgh of Annan by the name o' "Bonie Mary"; and I tauld the tale as follows: (N. B.—the chorus is auld.)

Come Cowe Me, Minnie, Come Cowe Me.

Tune.—"My Minnie's ay glowerin o'er me."

Forgive this wicked scrawl. Thine in all the sincerity of a brace of honest Port.

R. B.

Oct. 25th, 1793.

I am trying to reveal to you the peculiar spirit of a certain class in England, the great middle-class which I know so well because I breathed in its mephitic air in my youth. And in exemplification I add that I have known a thoroughly sincere man express himself as shocked when he heard a class of young Scottish children singing "Duncan Gray." How he came to find anything reprehensible in it I cannot imagine, but he did. Consider it from any angle you like, and wonder.

#### DUNCAN GRAY

Duncan Gray cam' here to woo,

(Ha, ha, the wooing o't,)

On blythe Yule-night when we were fou, (Christmas...merri

(Ha, ha, the wooing o't.)

Maggie coost her head fu' high, (tossed)

Loo'd asklent and unco skeigh, (disdainful)  
 Gart poor Duncan stand abeigh; (made...aloof)  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Duncan fleech'd and Duncan pray'd; (begged)  
 (Ha, ha, the wooing o't;)  
 Meg was deaf as Ailsa craig,  
 (Ha, ha, the wooing o't:)  
 Duncan sigh'r baith out and in,  
 Grat his e'en baith bleer't an' blin', (wept)  
 Spak o' lowpin o'er a linn; (leaping...rocky waterfall)  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Time and Chance are but a tide,  
 (Ha, ha, the wooing o't:)  
 Slighted love is sair to bide,  
 (Ha, ha, the wooing o't:)  
 "Shall I like a fool," quoth he,  
 "For a haughty huzzie die? (hussy)  
 She may gae to—France for me!"  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

. . . . .

Duncan was a lad o' grace,  
 (Ha, ha, the wooing o't:)  
 Maggie's was a piteous case,  
 (Ha, ha, the wooing o't:)  
 Duncan could na be her death, /  
 Swelling Pity smoor'd his wrath; (smothered)  
 Now they're crouse and canty baith, (strong...merry)  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Here I digress, making a necessary detour as proper  
 and timely, so to speak, because it is good

. . . to see our sel's  
 As ithers see us.

That decency which is most abominable indecency is  
 not a thing of the past, nor does it belong to England  
 and Scotland alone. It is with us now and here, and if

the freedom of life in cities be pointed to in refutation of what I say in this connection, then I reply that the vast majority of people do not live in cities.

I am moved to give an amazing instance. It is one that forces me to believe that exactly the same spirit of pretended dovecot innocence that filled polite and respectable England in the days of Cowper is still with us here and now. After leaving the city of Cleveland, in Ohio, I settled on an abandoned farm three miles from the university town of Fayetteville, in Arkansas, thinking to raise live stock, for to do that had been a dream of mine when I sailed the seas, and when I looked for virgin gold in the yellow clay of Patagonia's rivers; and the language and the humor of the men who followed the sea and who dug gold had a certain largeness about it. Now being settled in my land, and seeing that the neighbors had scrub stock to a very large extent, also learning that the excuse made for raising inferior stock was that initial processes where better grade stock was concerned cost too much—with all these, I decided to buy, and bought, a registered Jersey bull and set no high figure upon his services. But the beast languished alone in the pasture. So, following the custom of the neighborhood, I chalked on the notice board by the mail box this legend,

Registered Jersey bull service \$1.00

and composed myself for the rush of business. But none came. Then, a day or two later, I found my advertisement had been carefully changed to read,

Registered Jersey mail service \$1.00

which seemed to have post-office connotations that held



me amazed. Presently there came to me a mild-mannered man, part school teacher, part farmer, part preacher, to whom I told the tale of the advertisement. Said he, with a hand raised to his lips, and caution in his eye, "I done that for you. We-all don't use that word. It's not proper. We call it male. Or cow-critter. Or cow-brute. Or gentleman-cow."

Infamous as that may seem, I am assured by Mr. Vance Randolph, who is an authority on such things, that the word "male-cow" appeared in an American scientific journal as late as 1917.

How, I ask you, would the good man have received Robert Burns as a subject for study in his school? Also a new light is thrown upon the remark of Richard Henry Stoddard, made in the collection called "Warner's Library," which runs: "It is not necessary to know anything about Burns' life to understand his poetry."

Upon the tremendous and unhappy effect of misunderstanding must be laid emphasis. The artificial may become so much a part of ourselves that the real becomes repugnant in a very solid way, as in the case of a young man born and bred in a South Atlantic island who went with me to Buenos Ayres. When a bunch of grapes was set before us at the hotel, he tasted, made a wry face, then said in all earnestness, "But they are not nearly as good to the taste as the canned grapes I've been accustomed to." And, by somewhat similar feeding upon artificialities, it came about that what Cowper, and what England too, knew of Scotland or of Scottish literature amounted to almost nothing. Even old Dr. Johnson had done his part in the way of national misunderstanding. Then there had been Alexander Scott and Sir Richard



Maitland in the sixteenth century, both given to mildly amatory verse with incursions into religion and morality as proper subjects for their muse. There had been Alexander Montgomery, and Alexander Hume, the former given to allegory and the latter venturing into descriptions of Scottish life. But while Hume, who became a gloomy Puritan in his later years, painted his Scottish landscape with sufficient clearness, his people were not in the least true to life, and a reader gets no key to the origin of Hume's fictional characters until he learns that Hume lived for some years in France. Hume's climate is a mild southern one, so mild that his people quit work at mid-day "noon meat and sleep to take." They rest "in a cave" where they drink "caller wine" and eat "salads steeped in oil." So Hume's Scotland-made-in-France, where

All laborers draw hame at even,  
And can to others say,  
Thanks to the gracious God of heaven,  
Which sent this lovely day,

might have furnished a pretty model for Cowper, but it was a place far removed from the Scotland Burns knew and had in mind when he wrote

Gie me a canny hour at e'en  
My arms about my deerie, O,  
An' warldly cares and warldly men  
May all gae tapsalteerie, O.

Cowper, whose idea of comfort and bodily contentment had been expressed in this dainty picture in "The Task,"

Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,  
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,  
And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn

Throws up a steamy column, and the cups  
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,  
So let us welcome peaceful evening in,

would have stuffed his fingers in his ears and fled, at  
hearing the thundering chorus of Burns' tinkers, and  
brawlers, and boozers who

. . . toomed their pocks, and pawned their duds,  
They scarcely left to co'er their fuds,  
To quench their lowin' drouth,

as they roared

Let them cant about decorum,  
Who have characters to lose.

Here's to budgets, bags and wallets!  
Here's to all the wanderin' train!  
Here's our ragged brats and callets!  
One and all cry out—Amen.

("Jolly Beggars")

Cowper, so strangely unadventurous, could hardly have  
suspected the existence of some people who were as  
familiar to Burns as his own hands; the man for whom  
a tea-urn and buttered toast signified a rich and rare  
occasion was poles apart from Burns who wrote a poem  
in which he exalted hard liquor, then went on to damn  
the "curs't horse-leeches o' th' excise" and ended with

Fortune! If thou'll but gie me stíll  
Hale breeks, a sconce and whiskey gill,  
And rowth o' rhyme to rave at will,  
Tak' a' the rest  
And deal't about as thy blind skill  
Directs thee best.

("Scotch Drink")

As for Cowper thinking of the rascal crowd at Poosie Nancie's as fit subjects for poesy, that were as impossible as it would have been to persuade Greek poets to sing of snow-capped hills and mist-veiled rocks when they held heroes, and derring-do, as the only fit subjects for immortalization in verse.

## PART V

### Fame Without Fortune

WHEN gentlemen richly endowed with imagination fall to deification, they play strange tricks with their subjects. Burns went to Edinburgh as almost every newly-appreciated writer goes to the capital of his country, and arrived there in the evening of Tuesday, November 28th, 1786. He rode on a very excellent pony furnished by a George Reid of Barquharie, and split the journey, spending a night at Covington where a large party of admirers met him and made the night pleasant. There are the attested facts. The son of the tenant on the farm told Christopher North all about it. And the tenant himself, a Mr. Prentice, who had subscribed for twenty copies of the poems, had been advised of Burns' coming by Mr. Reid. The story of the coming of Burns runs:

All the farmers in the parish had read the poet's then published works, and were anxious to see him. They were all asked to meet him at a late dinner, and the signal of his arrival was to be a white sheet attached to a pitchfork, and put on the top of a corn-stack in the barnyard. The parish is a beautiful amphitheatre, with the Clyde winding through it—Wellbrae Hill to the west, Tinto Hill and the Culter Fells to the south, and the pretty, green, conical hill. Quothquan Law, to the east. My father's stack-yard, lying in the centre, was seen from every house in the parish. At length Burns arrived, mounted on a borrowed pownie. Instantly was the white flag hoisted, and as instantly were seen the farmers issuing from

their houses, and converging to the point of meeting. A glorious evening, or rather night, which borrowed something from the morning, followed, and the conversation of the poet confirmed and increased the admiration created by his writings. On the following morning he breakfasted with a large party at the next farmhouse, tenanted by James Stodart; . . . took lunch with a large party at the bank in Carnwath, and rode into Edinburgh that evening on the pownie, which he returned to the owner in a few days afterwards by John Samson, the brother of the immortal Tam.

But so simple and ordinary a proceeding would not do for gentlemen with a bent to deification, so Dr. Currie, determined to invest his hero with dreary dignity, had him perform his journey on foot. Another biographer, keeping up the dreary dignity and adding a battle against relentless forces, made him arrive at Edinburgh so foot-sore and wearied with the journey, that he could not leave his room for two days after reaching the city. Allan Cunningham, the parliamentary reporter and miscellaneous writer who in his youth knew Burns, makes the poet take a light-hearted view of things in general and tells the world that he

Took a secret leave of his mother, and away he  
walked through Glenap to Edinburgh. He turned his  
face to Arthur's Sear, and sun, with much buoyancy  
of heart as he went, a soothing snatch of an old  
ballad,

"As I cam in by Glenap, I met wi' an aged woman;  
She bade me cheer up my heart, for the best o' my  
days was comin'."

Then someone else takes exception to Cunningham and points out that Glenap is as far from Mossgiel to the south-west as is Edinburgh to the north-east; so, appar-

ently, towards Burns' biographers we must adopt the same caution that Tony Weller advised where widows were concerned.

Keeping to the letters Burns wrote, we find him making a pleasant business of his Edinburgh jaunt, congratulating himself on his reception, not in any spirit of self-importance or with any delusion of grandeur, but rather in the way of an habitual jester.

For my own affairs, I am in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas à Kempis or John Bunyan; and you may expect henceforth to see my birth-day inserted among the wonderful events, in the Poor Robin's and Aberdeen Almanacks, along with the Black Monday, and the battle of Bothwell Bridge. My lord Glencairn and the Dean of Faculty, Mr. H. Erskine, have taken me under their wing; and by all probability I shall soon be the tenth worthy, and the eighth wise man in the world.

Thus he writes to Gavin Hamilton of Mauchline.

As I take it, we must see Burns as seeing himself being regarded as a curiosity, and to be looked at that way is always unpleasant. The Honorable Earl of Buchan, My Lord of Glencairn, the Dean of Faculty Harry Erskine and the rest of them were all very well, but the man Burns, while lacking in some of the superficialities of society, stood higher because he knew more, because he had seen and experienced more, because he knew more sides of life, because he had a richer imagination. He rested under no delusions as to the permanency of all that favoritism and adulation and he knew himself for a fish out of water.

I am got under the patronage of the Duchess of Gordon, Countess Dowager of Glencairn, Sir John Whitefoord, the Dean of Faculty, Professors Blair,



Stewart, Greenfield, and several others of the noblesse and literati. I believe I shall begin at Mr. Creech's as my publisher. I am still undetermined as to the future; and, as usual, never think of it. I have now neither house nor home that I can call my own, and live on the world at large. I am just a poor wayfaring Pilgrim on the road to Parnassus, a thoughtless wanderer and sojourner in a strange land. . . ."

Again, to reveal the level-headedness of the man of the soil, there is a passage in a letter written about the same time to Robert Aiken, running:

. . . You will very probably think, my honored friend, that a hint about the mischievous nature of intoxicated vanity may not be unseasonable; but, alas! you are wide of the mark. Various concurring circumstances have raised my fame as a Poet to a height which I am absolutely certain I have not merits to support; and I look down on the future as I would into the bottomless pit. . . .

He had discovered, I think, that those who befriended him and knew nothing about literature lifted him to impossible heights, while those who were not his friends and knew something about literature thrust him to impossible depths.

As for the outer man, as others saw him at the time, there is the portrait made by Nasmyth, and described by Lockhart thus:

Mr. Nasmyth has prepared, for the present "Memoirs," a sketch of the poet at full length, as he appeared in Edinburgh in the first hey-day of his reputation; dressed in tight jockey boots, and very tight buckskin breeches, according to the fashion of the day, and (Jacobite as he was) in what was considered as the Fox livery, *viz.*, a blue coat and buff waistcoat, with broad blue stripes. The surveying

friends of Burns, who have seen this picture, are unanimous in pronouncing it to furnish a very lively representation of the bard as he first attracted public notice in the streets of Edinburgh. The scenery of the background is very nearly that of Burns's native spot—the river and bridge of Doon, near Alloway Kirk.

Mrs. Alison Cockburn, authoress of the charming song, "I've Seen the Smiling of Fortune Beguiling," who was, in 1786, a lively old lady residing in Crichton Street, Edinburgh, thus wrote to a friend, near the close of that year:

The Town is at present agog with the Ploughman Poet, who receives adulation with native dignity, and is the very figure of his profession—strong, but coarse; yet has a most enthusiastic heart of love. He has seen Duchess Gordon, and all the gay world. His favorite, for looks and manners, is Bess Burnet—no bad judge indeed! . . . The man will be spoiled if he can spoil: but he keeps his simple manners and is quite sober. No doubt he will be at the Hunter's Ball tomorrow, which has made all women and milliners mad. Not a gauze cap under two guineas—many ten, twelve.

As to what "Duchess Gordon and the gay world" meant, we have this in a contemporary letter:

The good town is uncommonly crowded and splendid at present. The example of dissipation set by her Grace the Duchess of Gordon, is far from showing vice her own image. It is really astonishing to think what effect a single person will have on public manners, when supported by high rank and great address. She is never absent from a public place, and the later the hour so much the better. It is often four o'clock in the morning before she goes to bed,

and she never requires more than five hours sleep. Dancing, cards, and company, occupy her whole time.

That was in London, and the Scottish capital imitated London.

But Burns kept his head. We have the testimony of the serene Andrew Dalzel, a professor of Greek in the university, to assure us.

We have got a poet in town just now, whom everybody is taking notice of—a ploughman from Ayrshire—a man of unquestionable genius, who has produced admirable verses, mostly in Scottish dialect, though some of them are nearly in English. He is a fellow of strong common sense, and by his own industry has read a good deal of English, both prose and verse. The first edition of his poems was published at Kilmarnock, and sold in that part of the country very soon, in so much that they are now not to be got. I, among others, have seen them, and admire some of them exceedingly. A new edition of them is now in press here, and he is encouraged by a most numerous subscription. It is thought that he will get some hundred pounds by it, which will enable him to make a small farm. He runs the risk, however, of being spoiled by the excessive attention paid him just now by persons of all ranks. Those who know him best, say he has too much good sense to allow himself to be spoiled. Everybody is fond of showing him everything here that the place furnishes. I saw him at an assembly t'other night. The Duchess of Gordon and other ladies of rank took notice of him there. He behaves wonderfully well; very independent in his sentiments, and has none of the *mauvaise honte* about him, though he is not forward.

It is difficult to see with all this testimony why writers of school books will persist in perpetuating this sort of thing, which I copy from one now in use.

Burns' fondness for taverns and riotous living shocked his cultured entertainers and when he returned to Edinburgh next winter . . . he received scant attention.

The fact is that Burns was regarded as a curiosity exactly as one in his circumstances would be regarded as a curiosity today, and the curiosity being satisfied the object would cease to interest. You can imagine a similar situation.

Suppose that out of these Ozark mountains there came a lad carrying a little bundle of manuscript of poetry which showed him capable of admirable powers of exposition, and of felicity of expression. Suppose, further, that he set no store on his work, regarded it indeed as more of a pastime than anything else to turn out verse. But suppose, further, that the language in which he wrote held a great many strange locutions of the kind you may hear in the back-hills of the Ozarks, as *I done been gone et my dinner*, or *Mary's a lovin'er gal as Meg*, but *Mawd's th' lovin'est gal ever I seen*. Also, suppose that in the lad's talk you found more than a trace of polytonics, a variation in tone which he used as a means of word discrimination, as when children make a kind of grunt for affirmation and a grunt differently intoned for a negative. You must also have the double negative, and you must have verbs fashioned from nouns, and redundancies, and interjected slang, and strange words and expressions. If such a lad, a poet by inherent and un-inherited quality of soul, set to work on the barbaric productions which we collect now-a-days with such care, ballads of mountain and plain and negro and cowboy and miner and sailor, to turn them into things of beauty as a sculptor fashions a work of art from shape-

less rock, so that the rejuvenated thing lived in the memories of men,—then you would have in such a lad something very much like Robert Burns as he appeared and appears to others than Scots. I emphasize the closing nine words because the imaginary lad and Robert Burns do not form exactly parallel cases, inasmuch as the language Burns used was a language, complete, rounded and accepted. The Ozarkian dialect is unstable in the extreme. Still, the comparison holds true in a certain way, and it also holds true in respect to the manner in which my suppositious lad would be regarded by the rest of America. But he would be a nine-day wonder and no more, to his contemporaries, and if a new wonder appeared on the horizon, a heavyweight champion, let us say, the poet would be quite forgotten.

Edinburgh and its society did not make the image of Jean grow dim.

To tell the truth, I feel a miserable blank in my heart, with want of her, and I don't think I shall ever meet with so delicious an armful again. She has her faults; and so have you and I; and so has everybody:

Their tricks and craft hae put me daft;  
 They've ta'en me in and a' that;  
 But clear your decks, and here's "The Sex!"  
 I like the jades for a' that;  
 For a' that and a' that,  
 An' twice as muckle's a' that, &c.

Thus runs part of a letter to Gavin Hamilton. But it is Burns of the many transformations and transmutations writing, who must needs refrain from imposing his mood upon his friend, must needs throw off the appearance of pessimism, and so there follows this,



I have met with a very pretty girl, a Lothian farmer's daughter, whom I have almost persuaded to accompany me to the west country should I ever return to settle there. By the by, a Lothian farmer is about an Ayrshire Squire of the lower kind; and I had a most delicious ride from Leith to her house yesternight, in a hackney coach, with her brother and two sisters, and brother's wife. We had dined all together at a common friend's house in Leith, and danced, drank, and sang till late enough. The night was dark, and the claret had been good, and I thirsty.

Then there were Masonic honors: the Grand Master giving a toast to "Caledonia, and Caledonia's bard, Brother Burns," and the poet "downright thunderstruck, and trembling in every nerve"; and, running parallel with that adulation, there are doubts which he expresses to his correspondent Mrs. Dunlap. The wine of praise is to be taken sparingly. Thus:

. . . you are afraid I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet; . . . I know myself and the world too well. I do not mean any airs of affected modesty; I am willing to believe that my abilities deserve some notice; but in a most enlightened, informed age and nation, when poetry is and has been the study of men of the first natural genius, aided with all the powers of polite learning, polite books, and polite company—to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity, and crude unpolished ideas on my head—I assure you Madam, I do not dissemble when I tell you I tremble for the consequences. The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised a partial tide of public notice which has borne me to a height, where I am absolutely feeling certain, my abilities are inadequate to



support me; and too surely I do see that time when the same tide will leave me, and recede perhaps as far below the mark of truth. I do not say this in the ridiculous affectation of self-abasement and modesty. I have studied myself and know what ground I occupy; and, however a friend or the world may differ from me in that particular, I stand for my own opinion in silent resolve, with all the tenaciousness of property. . . .

He had studied himself and he knew what ground he occupied. His mission was to make songs, but the hero-worshiping world would try to fatten to its death the goose that laid the golden eggs. Society looking for entertainment bade him stay and amuse it. He felt the urge to go forward, to experience, to live life as he knew it, to try his own experiments. Delight lay not in listening to others tell him of his triumphs, it lay in triumphing. For him the loud public trumpets meant nothing. To do meant all, but he was not doing. He knew himself to be most essentially of the people, the simple people. To have his name in the mouths of mediocrities seemed nothing short of silly, even when they spoke of niches in Fame's temple, as he wrote to Dr. John Moore in one of those open-hearted letters.

The hope to be admired for ages is . . . an unsubstantial dream. For my part my first ambition was and still my strongest wish is, to please my compeers, the rustic inmates of the hamlet, while ever-changing language and manners shall allow me to be relished and understood. I am very willing to admit that I have some poetical abilities; and as few if any writers, either moral or poetical, are intimately acquainted with the classes of mankind among whom I have chiefly mingled, I may have seen men and manners in a different phasis from what is common,

which may assist originality of thought. Still I know very well the novelty of my character has by far the greatest share in the learned and polite notice I have lately had; and in a language where Pope and Churchill have raised the laugh, and Shenstone and Gray drawn the tear; where Thomson and Beattie have painted the landscape, and Lyttleton and Collins described the heart, I am not vain enough to hope for distinguished poetic fame.

And to the Earl of Buchan who advised him to "fire" his "muse at Scottish story and Scottish scenes" he writes, ". . . I must return to my humble station, and woo my rustic Muse in my wonted way at the plough-tail."

Brave words those from a brave heart, though he might well have loosed his power of sarcasm on the writer of the letter that prompted the answer.

On second thought, that letter is well worth quoting as showing something of the ridiculous conceit of the writer, a dreary old fool, who would be a patron of literature; but, be it said, Buchan did not stand unique in his pretentious silliness.

Edinburgh, February 1, 1787.

Mr. Burns—I have read with great pleasure several of your poems, and have subscribed in Lady Glencairn's list for six copies of your book for myself, and two for Lady Buchan.

These little doric pieces of yours in our provincial dialect are very beautiful, but you will soon be able to diversify your language, your Rhyme and your subject, and then you will have it in your power to show the extent of your genius and to attempt works of greater magnitude, variety and importance. Take care, however, that you do not suffer the wings of your Pegasus to be sullied or curtailed by the grosser or more polished invaders of your genuine Invention, but let him fly with the rein, but not the curb. Keep

your eye upon Parnassus and drink deep of the fountain of Helicon, but beware of the Joy that is dedicated to the Jolly God of wine.

Go and visit my Parnassus on the banks of the Tweed, and visit the birthplace of Thomson on the Water of Rule; feed your Muse with Ethereal mildness when the Spring first opens the primrose on the steep verdant margin of *his* parent stream; fire her in Summer with the view of Flodden Field from the Summit of Mount Eildon; ripen her in Autumn with the placid chearful scenes of harvest and the snowey fleece yielding to the happy hands of the contented shepherd; and in Winter sit on the ruins of Dryburgh, and with the history of your country full in your memory and in your heart, call upon her genius to inspire you with the Majesty of Song; and may the Apollo of my Nypa who sits on the fork of Eildon enable you to produce the genuine offspring of Genius, sentiment, and skill—never to die.

I am, Mr. Burns, with great justice to your merits,  
your well-wisher,

Buchan.

So the illimitable fool of an Earl pats Burns on the head as if saying: "Try, my boy, and you'll do something good, some day. You will soon talk as well as I."

But Burns should not be limited to the fewer words I have given. The whole answer fits too well into the scheme, so here it is:

My Lord—the honor your Lordship has done me by your notice and advice in yours of the 1st Inst., I shall ever gratefully remember.

Praise from thy lips 'tis mine with joy to boast,  
They can best give it who deserve it most.

Your Lordship touches the darling chord of my heart when you advise me to fire my Muse at Scottish story and Scottish scenes. I wish for nothing more

than to make a leisurely pilgrimage through my native country; to sit and muse on those once hard-contested fields where Caledonia, rejoicing, saw her bloody lion borne through broken ranks to victory and fame; and catching the inspiration, to pour the deathless Names in Song. But, my Lord, in the midst of these delighting enthusiastic Reveries, a long-visaged, dry, moral-looking Phantom strides across my imagination, and with the frigid air of a declaiming Preacher, sets off with a text of Scripture—"I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence. Friend, I do not come to open the ill-closed wounds of your Follies and Misfortunes, merely to give you pain; I wish through these wounds to imprint a lasting impression on your heart! I will not mention how many of my salutary advices you have dispised. I have given you line upon line, precept upon precept; and while I was chalking you out the straight way to Wealth and Character, with audacious effrontery, you have zig-zaged across the path, contemning me to my face. You know the consequences. It is not yet three months since Home was so hot for you, that you were on the wing for the western shore of the Atlantic; not to make a fortune, but to hide your disgrace.

"Now that your dear lov'd Scotia puts it in your power to return to the situation of your forefathers, will you follow these will-o'-wisp meteors of Fancy and Whim, till they bring you once more to the brink of ruin? I grant the utmost ground you can occupy is but half a step from the veriest Poverty, but still it is half a step from it. If all that I can urge is effectual, let Her who seldom calls to you in vain, let the call of Pride prevail with you. You know how you feel at the iron grip of ruthless Oppression: you know how you bear the galling sneer of contumelious Greatness. I hold you out the conveniences, the comforts of life, independence and character, in the one hand; I tender you servility, dependence and wretch-

edness, in the other: I will not insult your Common sense by bidding you make a choice."

This, my Lord, is an unanswerable harangue. I must return to my rustic station, and in my rustic way woo my rustic Muse at the Ploughtail. Still, My Lord, while the drops of life, while the sound of Caledonia, warm my heart; gratitude to that dear priz'd country in which I boast my birth, and gratitude to those her distinguished Names who have honored me so much with their Approbation and Patronage, shall, while stealing through my humble Shades, ever distend my bosom, and at times, as now, draw forth the swelling tear. I have the honor to be, with the highest respect, My Lord, your much indebted, humble ser(vant),

Robert Burns.

Lawn Market, Feb. 7, 1787.

That Buchan conceit, and more of the same sort, got on Burns' nerves if the story told by Cromek of Burns' "greatest breach of decorum" is true, as it well may be. All honor to Burns for the breach, say I.

The occasion was a "literary breakfast," and the talk ran on Gray's "Elegy," which the Rev. William Robb did not like, and said so at great length. For a time Burns listened, hiding his impatience by playing with a child that sat on the knee of the lady on his right hand, but as the reverend bore went on, the poet asked him to quote the offending stanzas. There he had his man on the hip for the critic made a miserable matter of it.

"Sir!" said Burns, "I now see that a man may be an excellent judge of poetry by square and rule, and, after all, be a damned blockhead!" Then the poet turned to the child and said, "I beg your pardon, my little dear!"

Be loving and you'll not want for love, runs an old



Scots saying. Other saws, the world over, seem to indicate a widespread agreement: To love and to be wise is impossible. Burns certainly found that to be true, especially in those Edinburgh days when his loves seem to be of the sort that did not turn to song. On August 15th, 1787, Burns was served with a warrant of imprisonment because of a sworn statement made by a young woman, a servant, that he was the father of her unborn child.

To that Burns replied:

. . . Jenny Clow, who had the misfortune to make me a father, with contrition I own it, contrary to the laws of our most excellent constitution, in our holy Presbyterian hierarchy. . . . I beg of you, for Heaven's sake, to send a porter to the poor woman . . . with five shillings in my name and, as I shall be in Edinburgh on Tuesday first, for certain, make the poor wench leave a line for me, before Tuesday, at Mr. Mackay's, White Hart Inn, Grassmarket, where I shall put up; and before I am two hours in town, I shall see the poor girl, and try what is to be done for her relief. I would have taken my boy from her long ago, but she would never consent. . . .

Again, in a letter to Thomson, his music publisher, a correspondence well worth reproducing for the benefit of music lovers be it said, Burns comes out with this:

. . . "Dainty Davie" I have heard sung nineteen thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine times, and always with the chorus to the low part of the tune; and nothing (since a Highland wench in the Cowgate once bore me three bastards at a birth) has surprised me so much as your opinion on this subject. . . .

So there we are, nothing short of amazed at the man's Pepys-like self-revelation. Fools will leap to denunciation, but better men will wonder at the mystery of it



all, will wonder at the social life and atmosphere; will wonder at the impulsive and Pan-like creature that was Robert Burns; will wonder at the complications and intricacies. Nor will those better men fail to remember that all the time, during that stay in Edinburgh, the man hungered for the pleasant open spaces and the simple life and simple companionship. Yet in a way I think I do understand the man. I have seen such, have lived with his sort, men of naturalness of intercourse who "took their fun where they found it," and who were quite unaffected about it, who never thought of exercising influence and would have thought it absurd for others to do so—but they were not poets. The high gods gave them small grain and they reaped small. But those high gods treated Robert Burns in other fashion. They overloaded him intellectually and emotionally with seed to sow, but they gave him the small grain too.

I spoke of the social life and atmosphere. We must see Burns free and easy-going, good-humored, turning to companions who would afford relief from all that Buchan-like pomposity, from all the solemnity of literary breakfasts and lion-hunting women who bought gauze caps to set off their charms when they met the poet at functions. Burns would naturally taste life on many strata. But he would never be condescending. He would enter simply and freely into the life about him. So his friends would be a curious collection if seen in a group, countesses and earls and dignified and hieratic folk at one end, sailors, porters, market-women, members of the Fencibles, tavern-keepers and Hob and Nob and Sandy at the other. There would be strange old characters who could remember the execution of Lords Kilmarnock and

Balmerino for treason, and of the octogenarian Lord Lovat; there would be those who were full of fury because Highland dress had been prohibited by Parliament; there would be many who had tales to tell of the Old Pretender, and of Prince Charles Edward Louis Casimir, the Young Pretender, who were both living at Rome; there would be those who had marched with the forty thousand rioters under Lord George Gordon when the houses of Catholics were burned and the gaols were opened and two hundred and ten were killed and two hundred and forty odd were wounded; and some who had in mind the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown and the victory of Washington. The affair of the diamond necklace and Cagliostro and Cardinal de Rohan and De la Motte was fresh in men's minds, for in the year that Burns was in Edinburgh the news came of De la Motte's death when she fell out of a window trying to escape arrest for debt. And men were prophesying strange things to come out of France. Then there were social clubs, and Robert Burns must needs be "the cock o' the company"; and to some kind of a club, The Crochallan Fencibles, Burns belonged. So life in the city held vast interest for him.

These Fencibles had a taste for Rabelaisian humor, and so Burns gathered together for them songs he had made and found, most of them of more energy than art, some of them plentifully besprinkled with the language of venery, some of them rich and racy. Doubtless few readers of mature age have failed to see, or to acquire a copy of, "The Merry Muses of Caledonia"; sometimes "Privately Printed—Not for Sale" under the title of "The Merry Muses of Robert Burns," which gives an

erroneous idea of their origin. Burns himself valued the collection enough to write to John M'Murdo:

I send you a perusal of what I have got together, I could not conveniently spare them above five or six days, and five or six glances at them will probably more than suffice you. A very few of them are my own. When you are tired of them please leave them with Mr. Clint, of the King's Arms. There is not another copy of the collection in the world; and I should be sorry that any unfortunate negligence should deprive me of what has cost me a great deal of pains.

Nevertheless some of them vanished from the world forever when Mr. Greenshields of Kerse, Lesmahago, got hold of them, after Burns' death; for he constituted himself censor and Lord Chief Destroyer, not only refusing sight of them to anyone, but burning them. With strange obliquity of vision he wrote: "How much it is to be regretted that Burns prostituted his genius! On broad moral ground I have just finished a bonfire of them, so here ends the matter."

Greenshields thought, the fool, that a man making such a collection must needs be morally deficient, and it would have gone hard with Chaucer and with Shakespeare had parts of their manuscript fallen into his hands. He did not see that vulgarity might be healthiness and veiled eroticism slow creeping disease. And Chambers, with an air of apology and some ineptness, tells us that Burns was led to collect the songs "by his enthusiastic reverence for all forms of his country's elder Muse; for, with a strange contradiction to the grave and religious character of the Scottish people, they possess a wonderful quantity of that kind of literature. Not that it is of an inflammatory character, but simply expressive of a profound sense of the ludicrous in connection with the

sexual affections." But there are songs in the "Merry Muse" that are no more Burns, nor Scots, than is "Hail, Columbia"; "The Deep Nine" for example, which is a sea song as old as are ships, and sung in many tongues, and a laugh provoker and clever humor at that. Some have a touch of Middleton and Dekker's "The Roaring Girl," as though a Moll Cutpurse's song had been turned into the vernacular, then touched up by a clever hand. But the point is that wherever men gather in sociable mood, there talk and song often runs to stuff of lecherous fragranciness, and when that's said all's said. Burns enjoyed that kind of thing on occasion and enjoyed seeing others enjoy it. And because there are all kinds of tastes, there is room in the world for all things, including sentimentality and vulgarity, which I place in juxtaposition because of their kinship. Also there is this. Burns was too frank a fellow to fail to see the way in which so many of his fellow countrymen secretly munched their erotic *pâtés de foie* under false pretenses. If men wanted bawdry, well they wanted it and it was well that they should have it, fairly and openly and in bawdy-minded company. But he was no hypocrite to roll a salacious morsel under his tongue and keep a sanctimonious face, as was so often done in the name of ecclesiastical discipline. To exemplify, and to point the lesson, I quote a passage from Hamilton Paul's memoir to be found in the 1819 edition of Burns.

It runs:

Another practice in the Church of Scotland susceptible of great abuse, but now getting fast into disrepute, is that of placing transgressors, who are perhaps less guilty than nine-tenths of the congregation, on the stool of repentance, and giving them a rebuke—often couched in most indecent language—in the

presence of youth, beauty, and innocence. Several of Burns' happiest effusions are adapted to display this part of ecclesiastical discipline in all its abominable colors, and will, no doubt, co-operate with the improvements of the age to accomplish its desuetude.

Burns' own experience at Mauchline when he took the stool of repentance gave rise to a song not very well known,—

#### THE CONTRABAND MARAUDER

Ye jovial boys who love the joys—  
 The blissful joys of lovers,  
 And dare avow wi' dauntless brow  
 Whate'er the lass discovers;  
 I pray draw near, and you shall hear,  
 And welcome in a *frater*  
 Who's lately been on quarantine—  
 A contraband marauder!  
 Fa, la, la, la! &c.

Before the congregation wide  
 I pass'd the muster fairly;  
 My handsome Betsy by my side,  
 We gat our ditty rarely:  
 My down cast eye by chance did spy  
 What made my mouth to water—  
 Those hills of snow that wyled me so  
 At first to be a fau'ter.  
 Fa, la, la, la! &c.

Wi' ruefu' face and signs o' grace,  
 I paid the kirk its hire:  
 The night was dark, and through the park  
 I couldna but convoy her:  
 A parting kiss—what could I less?  
 My vows began to scatter!  
 She was na' shy—nae mair was I,  
 A kirk-condemned defau'ter!  
 Fa, la, la, la! &c.



But by the sun and moon I swear—  
 And I'll fulfil ilk hair o't  
 That while I own a single crown  
 She's welcome to her share o't:  
 My sweet wee girl, her mother's pearl,  
 And darling o' her pater,  
 For her dear sake the name I'll take—  
 A kirk-condemned defau'ter!  
 Fa, la, la, la! &c.

Burns must have worried about the slowness of the publisher Creech, who was setting out the edition of three thousand copies of his work, in effect a reprint of the Kilmarnock book with the addition of "Death and Doctor Hornbrook," "The Ordination" all ironical and prodding the orthodox, and the "Address to the Unco Guid," containing something of his life's philosophy. "It is one thing to live care-free," he says, in effect, among other things, "But the prudent man is the safest, though he has not so good a time." I quote, incidentally:

But why o' death begin a tale?  
 Just now we're living sound an' hale;  
 Then top and maintop crowd the sail;  
                     Heave care o'er-side!  
 And large before Enjoyment's gale,  
                     Let's tak the tide.

. . . . .

When ance life's day draws near the gloamin,  
 Then fareweel vacant, careless roamin;  
 An' fareweel cheerfu' tankards foamin,  
                     An' social noise:  
 An' fareweel dear, deluding Woman,  
                     The joy of joys!

. . . . .



With steady aim, some Fortune chase;  
 Keen Hope does every sinew brace;  
 Thro' fair, thro' foul, they urge the race,  
     And seize the prey:  
 Then cannie, in some cozy place,  
     They close the day.

And others like your humble servan',  
 Poor wights! nae rules nor roads observin',  
 To right or left eternal swervin',  
     They zig-zag on;  
 Till, curst with age, obscure an' starvin',  
     They aften groan.

. . . . .

O ye douce folk that live by rule,  
 Grave, tideless-blooded, calm an' cool,  
 Compar'd wi' you—O fool! fool!  
     How much unlike!  
 Your hearts are just a standing pool,  
     Your lives a dyke!

He fidgeted back and forth to the printer, correcting his copy by fits and starts as he strode up and down the print-shop slapping his leg with a riding whip, using, when he sat, one particular stool which came to be known as Burns' stool. Once Sir John Dalrymple, who was having printed his "Essay on the Properties of Coal Tar," took the Burns stool, knowing nothing of its tradition. Then Burns came in and stood glaring.

"What does that fellow want?" asked Dalrymple, and was duly enlightened.

"I'll give up the stool for no one," said Dalrymple.

"But it is Robert Burns the poet," said the printer.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Dalrymple. "Burns the poet? Then give him all the stools in the house and welcome."

But honor was one thing, cash another, and when settling time came, Master Creech was slow. How much Burns received is not known, but it lay between four hundred and fifty and five hundred pounds, enough at any rate to permit the sending of a hundred and eighty pounds to his brother Gilbert, and to finance a little tour on horseback around the country with his friend, Robert Ainslie. Burns kept a journal in a scrappy kind of way, while on the tour.

That journal contains little of reflection, little of ways, manners and customs, many jotted-down notes of men and women met, especially women. There are amusing sketches that remind one of the swift remarks made by Art Young in his "On My Way," as that he went to church and heard

A man of strong lungs . . . ill skilled in propriety, and altogether unconscious of his want of it. . . . Breakfast with Mr. — in Jedburgh—a squabble between Mrs. —, a crazed, talkative slattern, and a sister of hers, respecting a minister—Miss gives Madam the lie; and Madam, by way of revenge, upbraids her that she laid snares to entangle the minister, then a widower, in the net of matrimony. . . . Miss Rutherford a beautiful girl, but too far gone woman to expose so much of a fine swelling bosom. . . . Walking party of ladies, Mrs. —, and Miss — her sister. These two appear still more comfortably ugly and stupid, and bore me most shockingly. Two Miss — tolerably agreeable. Miss Hope, a tolerably pretty girl, fond of laughing and fun. Miss Lindsay, a good-humored, sensible girl; rather short *et embonpoint*, but handsome, and extremely graceful—beautiful hazel eyes, full of spirit and sparkling with delicious moisture—an engaging face, *un tout ensemble* that speaks her of the first order of female minds—her sister, a bonnie, strappan, rosy,

sonsie lass. Shake myself loose, after several unsuccessful efforts, of Mrs. — and Miss —, and somehow or other got hold of Miss Lindsay's arm. My heart is thawed into melting pleasure after being so long frozen up in the Greenland bay of indifference amid the noise and nonsense of Edinburgh. Miss — seems well pleased with my bardship's distinguishing her; and after some slight qualms, which I could easily mark, she sets the titter round at defiance, and kindly allows me to keep my hold; and when parted by the ceremony of my introduction to Mr. Somerville, she met me half, to resume my situation. N. B. The poet within a point and a half of being damnably in love—I am afraid my bosom is still nearly as tender as ever.

Burns, to use a present-day very effective campus-cant word, seems in danger of becoming a "parlor snake" and a "big it" with a mind too much given to "queening." He would have used the vernacular of his time and day describing himself, could he have seen himself as others saw him. At Jedburgh, it is very apparent, the Miss —, for whom he had a dislike, watched him like a hawk. So he launches into vituperation. She is "cross-grained, ugly, slanderous," and filled with "poisonous spleen," while Miss Lindsay is his "Dulcinea" and one of "the finest pieces of the workmanship of Almighty Excellence." When Miss Lindsay is not a guest at a supper party, he is "vexed." Presently there is talk, "the *bruit* of Miss Lindsay and my bardship, by means of the invention and malice of Miss —." Also presently, "I find Miss Lindsay would soon play the devil with me—I met with some little flattering attentions from her." At last he leaves Jedburgh, after being presented with the freedom of the burgh, and thus rhapsodises:

Jed, pure be thy crystal streams, and hallowed thy sylvan banks! Sweet Isabella Lindsay, may peace dwell in thy bosom, uninterrupted, except by the tumultuous throbbings of rapturous love! That love-kindling eye must beam on another, not on me; that graceful form must bless another's arms; not mine!

But out of Jedburgh came none of that divine experience which Plato says is poetry.

So the Border tour amounted to nothing for the immediate enrichment of literature. He was active in unimportant things:

I talk of love to Nancy the whole evening. . . . My bardship's heart got a brush from Miss Betsy. . . . Miss — will accompany me to Dunbar by way of making a parade of me as a sweetheart of hers. . . . Found Miss Ainslie, the amiable, the sensible, the good-humored, the sweet Miss Ainslie, all alone at Berrywell—Heavenly powers, who know the weakness of human hearts, support mine! What happiness must I see only to remind me that I cannot enjoy it! . . . Out to Berrywell in the evening with Miss Ainslie—how well-bred, how frank, how good she is! Charming Rachel! may thy bosom never be wrung by the evils of this life of sorrows, or by the villainy of this world's sons!

In short, Burns made himself ridiculous in the way of Everyman. And when he reached Dumfries, where the freedom of the burgh was presented him, he found himself pulled up sharp and given cause for thought. The shock came in the form of a letter from May Cameron, a girl servant in Edinburgh, and it told of her "trouble," and of being "out of quarters and out of friends, my situation at present is really deplorable. I beg, for God's sake, you will write and let me know how I am to do. You can write to any person you can trust to get me a place to

stay in till such time as you come to town yourself." What better example than Burns could be required to prove that man's life is controlled vastly more by what is felt, than by what is known, or by the result of experience?

So at last he reaches Mauchline again, and a letter written to William Nichol, a very characteristic production, tells all that is to be told. It is dated June 18th, 1787, and runs:

I am now arrived safe in my native country, after a very agreeable jaunt, and have the pleasure to find all my friends well. I breakfasted with your gray-headed, reverend friend, Mr. Smith; and was highly pleased both with the cordial welcome he gave me, and his most excellent appearance and sterling good sense.

I have been with Mr. Miller at Dalswinton, and am to meet him again in August. From my view of the lands and his reception of my bard-ship, my hopes in that business are rather mended; but still they are but slender.

I am quite charmed with Dumfries folks—Mr. Burnside, the clergyman, in particular, is a man whom I shall ever gratefully remember; and his wife, Gude forgie me! I had almost broke the tenth commandment on her account. Simplicity, elegance, good sense, sweetness of disposition, good humor, kind hospitality, are the constituents of her manner and heart; in short—if I say one word about her, I shall be directly in love with her.

I never, my friend, thought mankind very capable of anything generous; but the stateliness of the Patricians in Edinburgh, and the servility of my plebeian brethren (who perhaps formerly eyed me askance) since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species. I have bought a pocket Milton, which I carry perpetually



about with me, in order to study the sentiments—the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid, unyielding independence, the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great personage Satan. 'Tis true, I have just now a little cash; but I am afraid the star that hitherto has shed its malignant, purpose-blasting rays full in my zenith; that noxious planet so baneful in its influence to the rhyming tribe, I much dread it is not yet beneath my horizon. Misfortune dodges the path of human life; the poetic mind finds itself miserably deranged in, and unfit for, the walks of business; add to all, that thoughtless follies and hare-brained whims, like so many *ignes fatui*, eternally diverging from the right line of sober discretion, sparkle with step-bewitching blaze in the idly-gazing eyes of the poor heedless bard, till, pop, “he falls like Lucifer, never to hop again.” God grant this may be an unreal picture with respect to me! but should it not, I have very little dependence on mankind. I will close my letter with this tribute my heart bids me pay you—the many ties of acquaintance and friendship which I have, or think I have, in life, I have felt along the lines, and, damn them! they are almost all of them of such frail contexture, that I am sure they would not stand the breath of the least adverse breeze of fortune; but from you, my ever dear sir, I look with confidence for the Apostolic love that shall wait on me “through good report and bad report”—the love Solomon emphatically says “Is strong as death.”

Out of conceit with his species! You note the passage. The stateliness of the Edinburgh patricians and the servility of his plebeian brethren! A pocket Milton to enable him to study the desperate daring and noble defiance of hardship of Satan! What is it all but idle talk? What the man needed, and needed badly, if you will but look at matters with a clear eye, was a bout of good, hard work after all that idling. He was all astray



and wandering without a goal. He was altogether away from the path nature had laid out for him. He had everything and more than he dreamed of having five years earlier, fame, money, leisure; but he had left behind the simplicity that had been his charm. As he had expressed himself to Mrs. Dunlop,

The appellation of a Scottish bard is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it is my most exalted ambition. Scottish scenes and Scottish story are the themes I could most wish to sing. I have no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagued with the routine of business—for which heaven only knows I am unfit enough—to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse. . . . &c.

The twin devils of vanity and ambition had gotten hold of him, and, worst of all, he had no straight-seeing, plain-talking friend to say things that needed to be said. And a friend he needed. So he sought Jean and presently there were consequences. "I was made very welcome to visit my girl," he wrote to Mrs. Dunlop, (never was such a man, except Pepys, to put things down in black and white), "and the usual circumstances began to betray her at the time I was laid up a cripple in Edinburgh."

Whether he refers to Jean or not in the latter part of the letter he wrote to James Smith cannot be known, that part in which he calls himself an "old hawk at the sport." Nor does it much matter. Burns was never the fine gentleman in the way you would apply that term to Sir Philip Sidney, or to Emerson, or to Surrey. His was the primitive nature. However, while the letter has been quoted as important as bearing on the case of Jean, it appears to me that far greater importance lies in its

earlier part. For there is the heartier Burns, the out-door Burns, the Burns enjoying life, the Burns away from indulgence and luxury. It is the Burns who can radiate enthusiasm, not the Burns erecting a shrine to sorrow because of a woman's moods.

The letter to James Smith is dated June 30th, 1787, and runs in part:—

On our return, at a Highland gentleman's hospitable mansion, we fell in with a merry party, and danced till the ladies left us, at three in the morning. Our dancing was none of the French or English insipid formal movements; the ladies sang Scotch songs like angels, at intervals; then we flew at "Bab at the Bowster," "Tullochgorum," "Loch Erroch-side," &c., like midges sporting in the mottie sun, or craws prognosticating a storm in a hairst-day. When the dear lasses left us, we ranged round the bowl till the good-fellow hour of six; except a few minutes that we went out to pay our devotions to the glorious lamp of day peering over the towering top of Ben-Lomond. We all kneeled; our worthy land-lord's son held the bowl; each man a full glass in his hand; and I as priest, repeated some rhyming nonsense, like Thomas-a-Rhymer's prophecies, I suppose. After a small refreshment of the gifts of Somnus, we proceeded to spend the day on Lochlomond, and reached Dumbarton in the evening. We dined at another good fellow's house, and consequently push'd the bottle: when we went out to mount our horses, we found ourselves "No verra fou but gaylie yet." My two friends and I rode soberly down the Loch side, till by came a Highlandman at the gallop, on a tolerably good horse, but which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather. We scorned to be outgalloped by a Highlandman, so off we started, whip and spur. My companions, though seemingly gayly mounted, fell sadly astern; but my old mare, Jenny

Geddes, one of the Rosinante family, she strained past the Highlandman in spite of all his efforts with the hair halter: just as I was passing him, Donald wheeled his horse as if to cross before me to mar my progress, when down came his horse, and threw his rider's breechless a—e in a clipt hedge; and down came Jenny Geddes over all, and my bardship, between her and the Highlandman's horse. Jenny Geddes trod over me with such cautious reverence that matters were not so bad as might well have been expected; so I came off with a few cuts and bruises, and a thorough resolution to be a pattern of sobriety for the future.

I have yet fixed on nothing with respect to the serious business of life. I am, just as usual, a rhyming, mason-making, rattling, aimless, idle fellow. However, I shall somewhere have a farm soon. I was going to say a wife too; but that must never be my blessed lot. I am but a younger son of Parnassus, and, like other younger sons of great families, I may intrigue, if I choose to run all risks, but must not marry.

I am afraid I have almost ruined one source, the principal one, indeed, of my former happiness—that eternal propensity I always had to fall in love. My heart no more glows with feverish rapture—I have no paraisaical evening interviews, stolen from restless cares and prying inhabitants of this weary world. I have only . . . That last is one of your distant acquaintances, has a fine figure, and elegant manners; and, in the train of some great folks whom you know, has seen the politest quarters in Europe. I do like her a good deal; but what piques me is her conduct at the commencement of our acquaintance. I frequently visited her when I was in —; and after passing regularly the intermediate degrees between the distant formal bow and the familiar grasp round the waist, I ventured, in my careless way, to talk of friendship in rather ambiguous terms; and after her return to —, I wrote to her in the same style. Miss —

construing my words farther than I intended, flew off in a tangent of female dignity and reserve, like a mounting lark in an April morning; and wrote me an answer which measured me out completely, what an immense way I had to travel before I could reach the climate of her favour. But I am an old hawk at the sport, and wrote her such a cool, deliberate, prudent reply, as brought my bird from her aerial towerings, pop, down at my foot, like Corporal Trim's hat.

As for the rest of my acts, and my wars, and all my wise sayings, and why my mare was called Jenny Geddes; they shall be recorded in a few weeks hence at Linlithgow, in the chronicles of your memory, by

Robert Burns.

Why the "old hawk" passage should have been by so many biographers identified as having to do with Jean is difficult to understand. What has Jean to do with European travel?

It has been said time and time again that the tour was fruitless from a productive point of view and the saying shows singular short-sightedness. The mind of man is not to be regarded in the light of a meat-grinding machine, with the eye a sort of receiving hopper and the tongue automatically producing a resulting mash. Everyone of common sense knows that a sight seen may be stored away unconsciously, to reappear greatly transformed years after. Indeed, in a sense, travel may be said to be inimical to production, and the greater the distance compassed the less likelihood there would be of result. It may sound paradoxical, but is nevertheless true, that the more one sees the less one sees. That is why automobile tourists, considered as a class, have been so barren of literary output. That is why you may look at a thousand moving pictures and remember nothing. But,

if gifted with speech, you might see as Burns did, a crushed flower, and produce a poem to touch the heart of the world for all time. Or you can read one page of a noble book and retain an impression for a life time. But you could pick fifty of the world's greatest poets, Shakespere and Goethe and Shelley of the party, then send them across the continent in sixteen hours in a Ford plane, yet not a single line would come as a result of the adventure.

What Burns received on his tour was exactly what other men would not have received. He got impressions. He did not rhapsodize on the scenery but he did go about with his eyes and ears open. He heard songs and noted them down in his book of memory. Where other men would have seen an ordinary sight and dismissed it as common, Burns beheld pure gold. Here for example; when on the edge of Braan Water he saw the well-known fiddler, Neil Gow:

Neil Gow plays — a short, stout-built, honest Highland figure with his grey hair shed on his honest, social brow; an interesting face marking strong sense, kind open-heartedness, mixed with unmistrusting simplicity.

Much that he heard came to enrich the world when the publication called "Johnson's Museum" appeared. That publication was the idea of an Edinburgh engraver who thought it well to collect old songs and tunes, and Robert Burns threw himself heartily into the work.



## PART VI

### Love on Stilts

SO the year 1787, with Robert Burns aged twenty-eight, passes as an unproductive one. It is sprinkled with names great and small, that of the Duke of Athol whose guest he was at Blair, also that of the Duke and Duchess of Gordon, with several who made obeisance before him in the Masonic Lodge. He made little excursions to Ayrshire to look at prospective farms, and he went to Edinburgh to talk with Creech the publisher who seems to have made settlements in a spiritless and timid way, and he talked a great deal about going to the Indies; then, when the year was almost at its close, he fell in with Mrs. M'Lehose, to whom he wrote some four dozen letters, addressing her as Clarinda.

Now Burns, who came to sign himself Sylvander, and Mrs. M'Lehose were of the same age. She is said to have been beautiful, able to quote "aptly from the poets," charming of manner, and had "produced many short poetical effusions," notably an "Address to a Blackbird." Moreover, her husband lived in Jamaica, and about her gathered artistic notabilities. She and Burns met at a tea-party at the home of a Miss Nimmo, monopolized one another, and commenced a correspondence, with Burns, in the second letter, assuring her, "I can say, with truth, Madam, that I never met with a person in my life whom I more anxiously wished to meet again than yourself." His first letter had told of his leaving the town, but in his second he announces a lengthened stay



because of an accident when he fell from a coach and bruised his knee. But Fate had worked in wondrous way in detaining him and, "I am determined to cultivate your friendship with the enthusiasm of Religion. . . . I cannot leave Edinburgh without seeing you. . . ."

That was written Saturday evening, and on Saturday evening she replied, going as it were on stilts, and beginning: "Enured as I have been to disappointments," and assuring him at considerable length that Fortune was blind, that all the world is related, that she comprehended his nameless feelings, that his lines were poetical, and that hers were not although she ventured to enclose a trifle she had scrawled, that she wanted to know how his leg improved, that if she had been a sister she would have called upon him, but "'tis a censorious world," and wound up by assuring him that they must needs meet, and Farewell, and God bless him. So they commenced, and presently Clarinda (or Mrs. M'Lehose) stands forth as a sort of Samuel Richardson heroine, sentimental, pious, mildly contentious; of fastidious delicacy, calm-minded on the whole, given to eloquent expression, "religion her balm in every woe." There is no doubt at all but that she made an effort to lift Burns above dissipation. Burns, with that damnable trick of his of suiting his mood to the way of the person he addressed, must needs talk about Almighty Love a great deal; must needs state his lack of ulterior motives, saying:

I do love you, if possible still better for having so fine a taste and turn for poesy. I have again gone wrong in my usual unguarded way, but you may erase the word and put esteem, respect, or any other tame Dutch expression you please in its place. I believe there is no holding converse, or carrying on correspondence, with an amiable woman, much less a

*gloriously amiable fine woman*, without some mixture of that delicious passion, whose most devoted slave I have more than once had the honor of being. —But why be hurt or offended on that account? Can no honest man have a prepossession for a fine woman, but he must run his head against an intrigue? Take a little of that tender witchcraft of love, and add it to the generous, the honorable sentiments of manly friendship; and I know but one more delightful morsel, which few, few in any rank ever taste. Such a composition is like adding cream to strawberries: it not only gives the fruit a more elegant richness, but has a peculiar deliciousness of its own.

But Burns played fair, sailing under no false pretenses. We find him telling her about his boy Robert, just after he wonders, thinking of a headache she had, “how can Pain or Evil be so daringly, unfeelingly, cruelly savage as to wound so noble a mind, so lovely a form?” Burns could be oratorically reckless, and, as the Peruvians say, love, knavery and necessity make men good orators. Rab the Ranter had the triple urge in the case of his widow, as he chose to call her. Mark the resonant phrases of this, after Clarinda has said:

If you have time and inclination, I should wish to hear your chief objections to Calvinism. . . . You told me you never had met with a woman who could love as ardently as yourself. I believe it; and would advise you never to tie yourself till you meet with such a one. Alas! you’ll find many who *canna*, and some who *wanna*; but to be joined to one of the former description would make you miserable. I think you had almost best resolve against wedlock; for unless a woman were qualified for the companion, the friend, and the mistress, she would not do for you. The last may gain Sylvander, but the others alone can keep him. Sleep, and want of room, prevent my

explaining myself upon "infidelity in a husband," which made you stare at me. [One is free to guess how the conversation had run in some previous meeting!] Adieu! Charming Clarinda must e'en resign herself to the arms of Morpheus. . . . P. S. I am probably to be in your Square this afternoon, near two o'clock. If your room be to the street, I shall have the pleasure of giving you a nod. . . .

That letter was written on Tuesday morning of January 8th, 1788, and Burns must have rushed to paper and ink, for dated Tuesday night we have this emotional explosion:

Sylvander to Clarinda.

Jany. 8, 1788.

I am delighted, charming Clarinda, with your honest enthusiasm for religion. Those of either sex, but particularly the female, who are lukewarm in that most important of all things—"O my soul, come not thou into their secrets!"

I feel myself deeply interested in your good opinion, and will lay before you the outline of my belief:—He who is our Author and Preserver, and will one day be our Judge, must be—not for His sake, in the way of duty, but from the natural impulse of our hearts—the object of our reverential awe and grateful adoration. He is almighty, and all-bounteous; we are weak and dependent; hence prayer and every other sort of devotion. "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life": consequently it must be in everyone's power to embrace His offer of "everlasting life"; otherwise he could not, in justice, condemn those who did not. A mind, pervaded, actuated, and governed by purity, truth, and charity, though it does not merit heaven, yet is an absolutely necessary prerequisite, without which heaven can neither be obtained nor enjoyed; and, by divine promise, such a mind shall never fail

of attaining "everlasting life": hence, the impure, the deceiving, and the uncharitable, exclude themselves from eternal bliss, by their unfitness for enjoying it. The Supreme Being has put the immediate administration of all this, for wise and good ends known to Himself, into the hands of Jesus Christ, a great personage, whose relation to Him we cannot comprehend, but whose relation to us is that of a Guide and Saviour; and who, except for our own obstinacy and misconduct, will bring us all, through various ways, and by various means, to bliss at last.

These are my tenets, my lovely friend; and which, I think, cannot be well disputed. My creed is pretty well expressed in the last clause of Jamie Dean's grace, an honest weaver in Ayrshire; "Lord, grant that we may lead a gude life! for a gude life maks a gude end, at least it helps weel!"

I am flattered by the entertainment you tell me you have found in my packet. You see me as I have been, you know me as I am, and may guess at what I am likely to be. I too may say, "Talk not of love, &c.," for indeed he has "plunged me deep in woe!" Not that I ever saw a woman who pleased unexceptionally, as my Clarinda elegantly says, "in the companion, the friend, and the mistress." *One* indeed I could except—*One*, before passion threw its mists over my discernment, I knew—the first of women! Her name is indelibly written in my heart's core—but I dare not look in on it—a degree of agony would be the consequence. Oh! thou perfidious, cruel, mischief-making demon, who presidest o'er that frantic passion—thou mayest, thou dost poison my peace, but shalt not taint my honor! I would not, for a single moment, give an asylum to the most distant imagination that would shadow the faintest outline of a selfish gratification, at the expense of *her* whose happiness is twisted with the threads of my existence. May she be happy as she deserves! And if my tenderest, faithfulest friendship can add to her

bliss, I shall at least have one solid mine of enjoyment in my bosom! Don't guess at these ravings!

I watched at our front window today, but was disappointed. It has been a day of disappointments. I am just risen from a two hours' bout after supper, with silly or sordid souls, who could relish nothing in common with me—but the Port. *One!*—'tis now "witching time of night"; and whatever is out of joint in the foregoing scrawl, impute it to enchantments and spells; for I can't look over it, but will seal it up directly, as I don't care for tomorrow's criticisms on it.

You are by this time fast asleep, Clarinda; may good angels attend and guard you as constantly and faithfully as my good wishes do!

"Beauty, which, whether waking or asleep,  
Shot forth peculiar graces."

John Milton, I wish thy soul better rest than I expect on my pillow tonight! Good night, my dearest Clárinda!

Sylvander.

Tuesday Night.

In return, Clarinda touches on the subject of the infidelity of a husband, "fond of his wife yet Sylvander like, hurried into a momentary deviation while his heart remained faithful," telling how, on confession and a' that and a' that, "reconciliation would be exquisite beyond almost anything I can conceive," then leaps to a discussion of the case of Jean with this:

I have been puzzling my brain about the fair one you bid me "not guess at." I first thought it your Jean; but I don't know if she now possesses your "tenderest, faithfulest friendship." I can't understand that bonie lassie: her refusal, after such proofs of love, proves her to be either an angel or a dolt. I beg pardon, I know not all the circumstances, and am no



judge therefore. I love you for your continued fondness, even after enjoyment: few of your sex have souls in such cases. But I take this to be the test of true love—mere desire is all that the bulk of people are susceptible of; and that is soon satisfied.

And she adds a postscript which gives indication enough that both love and knavery had made Burns eloquent to the detriment of Jean, "who poisons your peace," in a way to which his actions both before and after give the lie. It reads:

This day is so good that I'll make out my call to your Square. I am laughing to myself at announcing this for the third time. Were she "who poisons your peace" to intend you a Pisgah view, she could do no more than I have done on this trivial occasion. Keep a good heart Sylvander; the eternity of your love-sufferings will be ended before six weeks. Such perjuries "the laughing gods allow." But remember there is no such toleration in friendship, and—I am yours,

Clarinda.

Again dropping into the vernacular, or rather putting a delicate situation into campus cant, Burns was playing "secret sorrow," trying to "sew up" a "wise baby" and play the "hijacker." But Clarinda was more than a match for him. "Your ravings last night," she writes, "and your ambiguous remarks, I cannot, perhaps ought not to comprehend. . . . Take care lest Virtue demand even Friendship as a sacrifice. You need not curse the tie of human laws, since what is the happiness Clarinda would derive from being loosed. . . . You have no cause to regret my 'bondage.' . . . Part of your interest in me is owing to mere novelty. . . ." And later she asks, "My God! Sylvander, why am I so anxious to make you embrace the Gospel? I dare not probe too



deep for an answer. . . ." But in spite of all asserted Platonic ideals, almost at a jump we find Burns addressing her as "my dear angel," then exclaiming,

Imagine that we were set free from the laws of gravitation, which bind us to this globe, and could at pleasure fly without inconvenience, through all the yet un conjectured bounds of creation, what a life of bliss would we lead, in our mutual pursuit of virtue and knowledge, and our mutual enjoyment of friendship and love! . . . Don't you see us hand in hand, or, rather, my arm about your lovely waist, making our remarks on Sirius, the nearest of the fixed stars, or surveying a comet, flaming innoxious past us, as we just now would mark the passing pomp of a travelling monarch; or in a shady bower of Mercury or Venus, dedicating the hour to love, in mutual converse, relying honor, and revelling endearment, whilst the most exalted strains of poesy and harmony would be the ready, spontaneous language of our souls! . . .

In plain words, and in spite of all the hero worshipers who have seen in the Clarinda-Sylvander correspondence "beautiful, lofty and tender discourse," it must be plain to anyone that Robert Burns is making an ass of himself, or else trying to make a fool of his "widow." He is juggling with catchwords. He is a phrase-making fellow quite insincere. He is cajoling. He is trying to evoke emotion by a string of words without sense. He is fustian like the soap-box orators who talk of "liberty and fraternity"; like the brush-arbor preacher who rants of the "blood of the Lamb"; like the fifth-rate Chautauquan lecturers who bow themselves off the stage by capping an hour of nonsense with the words "Heaven, Home and Mother, and our glorious flag that waves on star-crowned heights." To get a true perspective, you have only to push aside the Clarinda letters

and read the true Burns, the Burns of the rich and full nature, not necessarily Burns at his best but at any rate Burns careless. This, for example:

WHISTLE, AN' I'LL COME TO YE, MY LAD

O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!  
 O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!  
 Tho' father an' mother an' a' should gae mad,  
 O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!

But warily tent when ye come to court me,  
 And come nae unless the back-yett be a-jee;  
 Syne up the back-style, and let naebody see,  
 And come as ye were na comin to me,  
 And come as ye were na comin to me!

At kirk, or at market, whene'er ye meet me,  
 Gang by me as tho' that ye car'd na a flie;  
 But steal me a blink o' your bonie black e'e,  
 Yet look as ye were na lookin to me,  
 Yet look as ye were na lookin to me!

Ay vow and protest that ye care na for me,  
 And whyles ye may lightly my beauty a wee;  
 But court na anither tho' jokin ye be,  
 For fear that she wyle your fancy frae me,  
 For fear that she wyle your fancy frae me!

*Chorus*

O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!  
 O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!  
 Tho' father an' mother an' a' should gae mad,  
 O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!

Or this:

IT IS NA, JEAN, THY BONIE FACE

It is na, Jean, thy bonie face  
 Nor shape that I admire,  
 Altho' thy beauty and thy grace

Might well awauk desire.  
 Something in ilka part o' thee  
 To praise, to love, I find;  
 But, dear as is thy form to me,  
 Still dearer is thy mind.

Nae mair ungen'rous wish I hae,  
 Nor stronger in my breast,  
 Than, if I canna mak thee sae,  
 At least to see thee blest:  
 Content am I, if Heaven shall give  
 But happiness to thee,  
 And, as wi' thee I wish to live,  
 For thee I'd bear to dee.

There was a meeting between Burns and his "widow," we gather from the correspondence, and evidently Burns the ardent put aside Burns the pretender and there were tense undertones. We get a hint from Clarinda's letter with its mixture of idealism and commonsense.

Clarinda to Sylvander.

Thursday Forenoon (Jany. 24th)

Sylvander, the moment I waked this morning, I received a summons from Conscience to appear at the Bar of Reason. While I trembled before this sacred throne, I beheld a succession of figures pass before me in awful brightness! Religion, clad in a robe of light, stalked majestically along, her hair dishevelled, and in her hand the Scripture of Truth, held open at these words—"If you love Me, keep My commandments." Reputation followed: her eyes darted indignation, while she waved a beautiful wreath of laurel, intermixed with flowers gathered by Modesty in the Bower of Peace. Consideration held her bright mirror close to my eyes, and made me start at my own image! Love alone appeared as counsel in my behalf. She was adorned with a veil, borrowed from Friendship,

which hid her defects, and set off her beauties to advantage. She had no plea to offer, but that of being the sister of Friendship, and the offspring of Charity. But Reason refused to listen to her defense, because she brought no certificate from the Temple of Hymen. While I trembled before her, Reason addressed me in the following manner:—"Return to my paths, which alone are peace; shut your heart against the fascinating intrusion of the passions; take Consideration for your guide, and you will soon arrive at the Bower of Tranquility."

Sylvander, to drop my metaphor, I am neither well nor happy to-day: my heart reproaches me for last night. If you wish Clarinda to regain her peace, determine against everything but what the strictest delicacy warrants.

I do not blame you, but myself. I must not see you on Saturday, unless I find I can depend on myself acting otherwise. Delicacy you know, it was which won me to you at once: take care you do not loosen the dearest, most sacred tie that unites us! Remember Clarinda's present and eternal happiness depends upon her adherence to virtue. Happy Sylvander! that can be attached to Heaven and Clarinda together. Alas! I feel I cannot serve two masters. God pity me!

That letter, and others, were delivered to Burns by Clarinda's servant, "who is a good soul," says Clarinda. It is not well to hang too many charges on an overburdened peg, but there have been those of curious bent who say they identify "My servant, who is a good soul" with that Jenny Clow, a servant girl, referred to later by Clarinda as "your old acquaintance, Jenny Clow." That reference was made in November, 1791, when the letters are from "Mrs. M'Lehose to Robert Burns" instead of "Clarinda to Sylvander," and when the lady is addressed "My dear Madam," and in the third person. The two

letters in question may as well be dealt with and put away now. Here they are:

Sir—I take the liberty of addressing a few lines in behalf of your old acquaintance Jenny Clow, who to all appearances is at this moment dying. Obligated from all the symptoms of a rapid decay, to quit her service, she is gone to a room almost without common necessities, untended and unmourned. In circumstances so distressing, to whom can she so naturally look for aid as to the father of her child, the man for whose sake she has suffered many a sad and anxious night, shut from the world, with no other companions than guilt and solitude? You have now an opportunity to evince you indeed possess these fine feelings you have delineated, so as to claim the just admiration of your country. I am convinced I need add nothing farther to persuade you to act as every consideration of humanity as well as gratitude must dictate. I am, Sir, your sincere well-wisher,

A. M.

To Mrs. M'Lehose, Edinburgh.

Dumfries, 23rd November, 1791.

It is extremely difficult, my dear Madam, for me to deny a lady anything; but to a lady whom I regard with all the endearing epithets of respectful esteem and old friendship, how shall I find the language of refusal? I have, indeed, a shade of the lady, which I keep in the *sanctum sanctorum* of my most anxious care. That lady, through an unfortunate and irresistible conjuncture of circumstances has lost me her esteem, yet she shall be ever, to me,

“Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart.”

I am rather anxious for her sake, as to her voyage. I pray God my fears may be groundless. By the way, I have this moment a letter from her, with a paragraph or two conceived in so stately a style, that I would not pardon it in any created being except herself; but as the subject interests me much, I shall answer it to



you, as I do not know her present address. I am sure she must have told you of a girl, a Jenny Clow, who had the misfortune to make me a father, with contrition I own it, contrary to the laws of our most excellent constitution, in our holy Presbyterian hierarchy.

Mrs. M— tells me a tale of the poor girl's distress that makes my very heart weep blood. I will trust that your goodness will apologize to your delicacy to me, when I beg of you, for Heaven's sake, to send a porter to the poor woman—Mrs. M., it seems, knows where she is to be found—with five shillings in my name; and, as I shall be in Edinburgh on Tuesday first, for certain, make the poor wench leave a line for me, before Tuesday, at Mr. Mackay's, White Hart Inn, Grassmarket, where I shall put up; and, before I am two hours in town, I shall see the poor girl, and try what is to be done for her relief. I would have taken my boy from her long ago, but she would never consent.

I shall do myself the very great pleasure to call for you when I come to town, and repay you the sum your goodness shall have advanced,

. . . and most obedient,

Robert Burns.

For all that checking and backing and warning of Clarinda's there was another meeting. "There was," wrote Walter Scott, "no scandal attached to her philandering with the Bard, though the lady ran risques, for Burns was anything but Platonic in his amours." Scandal or not, there was verbal dynamite enough in the letters to blow up any matrimonial establishment if they had been read aloud in court by a Sergeant Buzfuz. "I was on my way, my love, to meet you (I never do anything by halves. . . ." is the beginning of a Burns letter, after the reconciliation. And "I could suffer the



lash of misery eleven months in the year were the twelfth to be composed of hours like yesternight. You are an angel, Clarinda."

It was a case of

Maggie coost her head fu' high.  
Look'd asklent and unco skeigh,  
Gart poor Duncan stand abeigh;  
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Duncan fleech'd and Duncan pray'd;  
Meg was deaf as Ailsa Craig.  
Duncan sigh'd baith out and in, etc.

Clarinda would have nothing of the sort of love Burns offered. "When you come across my mind as a lover, something within gives a sting resembling that of guilt," she writes. She seems filled with a passionate desire for intellectual companionship added to religious faith, and Burns pretends to both but has neither. Both of them, I am sure, are playing a part and it is a case of nature imitating art. Burns plays the rôle of The Man of Feeling, but his acting of the part is not superb by any means. She plays a Richardson heroine easily and amusingly, because she identifies herself with the part. But she, too, can rant on occasion as when she plays with the idea of the unhappy marriage victim. "Tell me why is this [sting of guilt]?" she asks. "It must be from the idea that I am another's. What? Another's wife! O cruel Fate! I am indeed bound in an 'iron chain'!" If Burns was not guilty of melodramatic acting at those private meetings then we cannot depend upon anything in Clarinda's letters for clues. "We must guard against going to the verge of danger," she says, very sensibly.

Then comes this, the story of her confession to the minister of Tolbooth parish church, a Reverend John

Kemp. What her association with her spiritual adviser meant to Robert Burns may be imagined from his subsequent outburst.

I have not patience to read the Puritanic scrawl. Damned sophistry. Ye heavens, thou God of nature, thou Redeemer of mankind! ye look down with approving eyes on a passion inspired by the purest flame, and guarded by truth, delicacy and honor; but the half-inch soul of an unfeeling, cold-blooded, pitiful Presbyterian bigot cannot forgive anything above his dungeon-bosom and foggy head. . . . I love, and will love you; and will, with joyous confidence, approach the throne of the Almighty Judge of men with your dear idea; and will despise the scum of sentiment, and the mist of sophistry."

You see Robert Burns furious as he reads Clarinda's letter telling of her confession. And, finely fired, Rab the Ranter takes the stage in a fit of gigantic energy. Some years ago, talking with my friend Herbert Brenon, the moving picture producer, about Burns, and of that particular scene, he said, "What a scene could be made out of that!" You can figure it for yourself with Burns writing that under a full head of steam, as it were, with the requisite business of forehead slapping and fist clenching and then what the producers call a "cut-back" with the passage from Clarinda's letter that produced the attack.

I had an hour's conversation with my worthy friend Mr. K—p. [You'll attribute perhaps to *this* the above sentiments.]

'Tis true, there's not one on earth has so much influence on me, except Sylvander; *partly* it has forced me to "feel along the mental intelligence." However, I've broke the ice. I confessed I had conceived a tender impression of late—that it was mutual, and that I had wish'd to unbosom myself to

him (as I always did), particularly to ask if he thought I should, or not, mention it to my friend? I saw he felt for me (for I was in tears); but he bewail'd that I had given my *heart*, while in my present state of bondage—wish'd I had made it friendship *only*—in short, talk'd to me in the style of a tender Parent, anxious for my happiness. He disapproves altogether of my saying a syllable of the matter to my friend; says it could only make him uneasy; and that I am in no way bound to do it by any one tie. This has eased me of a load which has lain upon my mind ever since our intimacy. Sylvander, I wish you and Mr. K—p were acquainted—such worth and sensibility! If you had his piety and sobriety of manners, united with the shining abilities you possess! you'd be “a faultless monster which the world ne'er saw.” He too has great talents. His imagination is rich, his feelings delicate, his discernment acute; yet there are *shades* in his, as in all characters: but these it would ill become Clarinda to point out. Alas! I know too many blots in my own.

Sylvander I believe nothing were a more practical task than to make you feel a little of genuine Gospel *humility*! Believe me, I wish not to see you deprived of that noble fire of an exalted mind which you eminently possess. Yet a sense of your faults—a feeling sense of them!—were devoutly to be wish'd. Tell me did you ever, or how oft have you smote on your breast, and cried, “God be merciful to me a sinner”? I fancy, once or twice, when suffering from the effects of your errors. Pardon me if I be hurting your “intrinsic dignity”; it need not—even “divine Clarinda” has been in this mortal predicament.

Then, following the comedy to its turn, we find Burns, the man of the world, holding off, top sawyer on the teeter board of love's emotion.

Time and chance are but a tide,  
Ha, ha, the wooing o't,

Slighted love is sair to bide,  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.  
 Shall I, like a fool, quoth he,  
 For a haughty hizzie die?  
 She may gae to—France for me!  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

How it comes let doctors tell.  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.  
 Meg grew sick as he grew hail,  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.  
 Something in her bosom wrings,  
 For relief a sigh she brings;  
 And O, her een they spak sic' things!  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

For Clarinda writes most woefully. She sorely misses all those ranting appeals to passion. She is no saint to love solitude and complacent thought.

I wish you had given me a hint, my dear Sylvander, that you were to write me only once a week. Yesterday I looked for a letter; to-day never doubted it; but both days have terminated in disappointment. A thousand conjectures have conspired to make me most unhappy. Often have I suffered such disquiet from forming the idea of such an attention, on such and such an occasion, and experienced quite the reverse. But in you, and you alone, I have ever found my highest demands of kindness accomplished; nay, even my fondest wishes, not gratified only, but anticipated! To what then can I attribute your not writing me one line since Monday?

God forbid that your nervous ailment has incapacitated you from that office from which you derive pleasure singly; as well as that most delicate of all enjoyments, pleasure reflected. Tomorrow I shall hope to hear from you. Hope, blessed hope, thou balm of every woe, possess and fill my bosom with thy benign influence!

. . . . .

So comes the cooling off on Burns' part, "I wrote you, dear Madam, the moment I alighted in Glasgow. Since then I have not had opportunity." "I hope, and am certain, that my generous Clarinda will not think my silence, for now a long week, has been in any degree owing to my forgetfulness." "I own myself guilty, Clarinda; I should have written you last week." "Excuse me, my dearest angel, this hurried scrawl and miserable paper." "I am just hurrying away to wait on the Great Man." Such passages appear in letter after letter and tell their own tale. To be sure there are passages here and there of the stilted kind, but they do not have the ring of sincerity, and no literary gentleman engaged in deification can make them appear other than hollow.

Let me set two examples side by side, the one part of a Burns letter to Clarinda, the other one of those gems of sincerity to be found now and then in literature. To be sure, the second has nothing to do with Burns, but I offer it as I would offer a true and well-balanced compass to a skipper all confounded in his sea-reckonings after a time of storm stress. It is part of a letter written by Robert Greene to his wife and found after his death, the Robert Greene who died in 1592 and wrote the plays "Orlando Furioso" and "The Scottish History of James IV."

First the Burns passage in a letter dated Midnight, Feb. 13th, 1788. It runs:

. . . The Searcher of hearts is my witness how dear you are to me; but though it were possible you could be still dearer to me, I would not even kiss your hand, at the expense of your conscience. Away with declamation! let us appeal to the bar of common sense. It is not mouthing everything sacred; it is not vague ranting assertions; it is not assuming, haugh-



tilly and insultingly assuming, the dictatorial language of a Roman Pontiff, that must dissolve a union like ours. Tell me, Madam, are you under the least shadow of an obligation to bestow your love, tenderness, caresses, affections, heart and soul, on Mr. M'Lehose—the man who has repeatedly, habitually, and barbarously broken through every tie of duty, nature or gratitude to you? The laws of your country indeed, for the most useful reasons of policy and sound government, have made your person inviolate; but are your heart and affections bound to one who gives not the least return of either to you? You cannot do it; it is not in the nature of things that you are bound to do it; the common feelings of humanity forbid it. Have you then, a heart and affections which are no man's right? You have. It would be highly, ridiculously absurd to suppose the contrary. Tell me then, in the name of common sense, can it be wrong, in such a supposition compatible with the plainest ideas of right and wrong, that it is improper to bestow the heart and these affections on another—while that bestowing is not in the smallest degree hurtful to your duty to God, to your children, to yourself, or to society at large?

This is the great test; the consequences: let us see them. In a widowed, forlorn, lonely situation, with a bosom glowing with love and tenderness, yet so delicately situated that you cannot indulge these nobler feelings except you meet with a man who has a soul capable of . . .

Sylvander.

Now, by way of Polaris, I would set against that a piece of sincerity. Even at the risk of being accused of dragging in a passage not pertinent, I reproduce it, glad to hold up a literary gem at any cost.

The remembrance of many wrongs offered thee,  
and thy unproved virtues, adds greater sorrow to



my miserable state than I can utter, or thou conceive. Neither is it lessened by consideration of thy absence (though shame would let me hardly behold thy face), but exceedingly aggravated; for that I cannot (as I ought) to thy own self reconcile myself, that thou mightest witness my inward woe at this instant that have made thee a woeful wife for so long a time. But equal heaven had denied that comfort, giving, at my last need, like succour as I have sought all my life: being in this extremity as void of help, as thou hast been of hope. . . . That I have offended thee highly, I know; that thou canst forget my injuries, I hardly believe; yet, persuade I myself, if thou saw my wretched estate, thou couldest not but lament it: nay, certainly I know thou wouldest. All my wrongs muster themselves about me; every evil at once plagues me. For my contempt of God, I am condemned of men; for my swearing and forswearing, no man will believe me; for my gluttony, I suffer hunger; for my drunkenness, thirst; for my adultery, ulcerous sores. Thus God hath cast me down, that I might be humbled, and punished for example of other sinners. And although he suffers me in this world to perish without succour, yet trust I in the world to come to find mercy, by the merits of my Saviour, to whom I commend thee, and commit my soul.

Thy repentant husband for his disloyalty,

Robert Greene.

That sagging of the Clarinda-Sylvander correspondence had a very natural cause. So had the insincerity. As to the last, the two persistent correspondents had carried their affair along on an impossible plane, as foolish letter-writers will, with Burns winding himself "too high for mortal man beneath the sky." It was impossible for him, or any other man, to keep himself above this high and abiding world with all that superheated air. He had to

get back to the good and wholesome and the invigorating, as does any man. There was the nobler and finer life of affairs, and he came to see, as all sensible men do, that the adventure of living is the real thing, and the affair of love and women only a passing affair. Woman can, at best, occupy only a very small part of the life of men in spite of all supposition to the contrary, also in spite of the organized efforts of writers of fiction that lay stress on mere minor incidents. He saw, as all men see, that it is not well to play fast and loose with truth. To be sure, there are the thrill of love and the fever of passion,—these are a part of the game of life,—but your true man knows the abiding comfort of the adventure of responsibility. There must come the development of personality and the stripping off and rejection of all that adventitious trappery assumed, more or less unconsciously, or heedlessly, when under the love influence. And Burns had heard the trumpet call to reality. He looked for a suitable farm, and he found one at Ellisland on which he set his heart.

Then, through the influence of the surgeon who attended him during his lameness, by way of the Chief of the Excise Board, Mr. Graham of Fintray, he had been promised a position in the Excise Department. And, most important in influencing him in many ways was this "legitimate child of Wisdom and Good Sense," as he wrote to Clarinda: "no less than a long thought-on and deeply matured design to marry a girl, fully as elegant in her form as the famous priestess whom Saul consulted in his last hours, and who had been second maid of honor to his deceased wife. . . . I spent the two by past days at Dunlop House with that worthy

family to whom I am deeply indebtedly early in my poetic career. . . ." So there was Jean in his heart.

Then there is this, the first nine words of which tell the tale of a man much worked upon by the sentimental Clarinda. It is from a letter dated Feb. 23rd.

. . . Now for a little news that will please you. I, this morning, as I came home, called for a certain woman. I am disgusted with her—I cannot endure her! I, while my heart smote me for the profanity, tried to compare her with my Clarinda; 'twas setting the expiring glimmer of a farthing taper beside the cloudless glory of the meridian sun. *Here* was tasteless insipidity, vulgarity of soul, and mercenary fawning; *there*, polished good sense, Heaven-born genius, and the most generous, the most delicate, the most tender passion. I have done with her, and she with me. . . . I have taken her a room; I have taken her to my arms; I have given her a mahogany bed; I have given her a guinea. . . .

And the "certain woman" was Jean. A week later we find him writing to Robert Ainslie, saying,

. . . I have been through more tribulation, and under much buffeting of the wicked one, since I came to this country. Jean I found banished, like a martyr—forlorn, destitute, and friendless; all for the good old cause; I have reconciled her to her fate; I have reconciled her to her mother.

The shelter that Burns found for Jean was a lodging in Mauchline where her mother attended her when she gave birth to twin daughters, March 3rd, 1788, who died a few days after their birth.

But the passage in the Clarinda letter is one that has set more theorists to work than anything in the whole of Burns' correspondence. He has been condemned as a

hypocrite, forgiven as a misguided man, excoriated as a libertine. He has been analyzed and psycho-analyzed. Every sort of explanation had been made to account for the passage in the letter to M'Lehose except that Burns was desperately drunk when he wrote it, and to that explanation I hold, basing the opinion upon what I know of men. When he writes to a man friend in whose company he can think aloud, not fearing to arouse any emotional storm, then you have a sober statement, as in the letter to Richard Brown.

. . . Reason almost always come to me like an unlucky wife to a poor devil of a husband, just in sufficient time to add reproaches to his other grievances. I found Jean with her cargo very well laid in, but unfortunately moored almost at the mercy of wind and tide. I have towed her into a convenient harbor, where she may lie till she unload, and have taken the command myself, not ostensibly, but for a time in secret. I am gratified with your kind inquiries after her [Jean], as after all, I may say with Othello—

“—Excellent wretch  
Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee!”

So the two come together after an exciting and stimulating chase; and holding, as I do, that the work's the man, I see the true Burns now putting himself into his job. The plant must flower according to its nature whatever twists and turns the stalk may have made. You will come to no erroneous conclusions as to the nature of the tree, seeing and tasting its fruit. So there is this to silence the world of carping critics.

I hae a wife o' my ain,  
I'll partake wi' naebody;

I'll take cuckold frae nane.  
I'll gie cuckold to naebody.

I hae a penny to spend,  
There—thanks to naebody!  
I hae naething to lend.  
I'll borrow frae naebody.

I am naebody's lord.  
I'll be slave to naebody.  
I hae a guid braid sword,  
I'll tak dunts frae naebody.

I'll be merry and free,  
I'll be sad for naebody.

Naebody cares for me.

I care for naebody.

("I Hae a Wife o' My Ain")

Presently he plays the part of humorous philosopher. He wrote to Cunningham,

Matrimony is quite a different thing from what your love-sick youth and sighing girls take it to be. But marriage, we are told, is appointed by God, and I shall never quarrel with any of His intentions. I am a husband of older standing than you, and shall give you my ideas of the happiness of the conjugal state (*en passant*—you know I am no Latinist—is not conjugal derived from *jugum*, a yoke?) Well then, the scale of good wife-ship I divide into ten parts:—Good nature, four; Good sense, two; Wit, one; Personal charms, viz,—a sweet face, eloquent eyes, fine limbs, graceful carriage (I would add a fine waist too, but that is so soon spoilt you know), all these one; as for the other qualities belonging to, or attending on a wife, such as fortune, connections, education (I mean more than the ordinary run), family blood, &c., divide the two remaining degrees among them as you please; only remember that all these minor properties must be expressed by fractions, for there is

not any one of them, in my aforesaid scale, entitled to the dignity of an integer.

However, the kirk-sessions must needs register its approval, so we have this:

1788, Aug 5. Compeared Robert Burns, with Jean Armour, his alledged Spouse. They both acknowledged their irregular marriage, and their sorrow for that irregularity, and desiring that the Session will take such steps as may seem to them proper, in order to the Solemn Confirmation of the said marriage.

The Session taking this affair under their consideration, agree that they both be rebuked for this acknowledged irregularity, and that they be taken solemnly engaged to adhere faithfully to one another as husband and wife all the days of their life.

In regard the Session have a title in Law to some fine for behoof of the Poor, they agree to refer to Mr. Burns his own generosity.

The above sentence was accordingly executed, and the Session absolved the said parties from any scandal on this account.

William Auld, Moderator

Robt. Burns

Jean Armour

(Mr. Burns gave a guinea note for behoof of the poor.)



## PART VII

### Jean the Level-Headed

IN his brief and hasty span of life Burns had known too many interferers, too many sentimentalists, too many with ulterior motives. He had fled from them all and would live anxiously and wretchedly no longer. Out burst, then, his contentment into song. To be let alone, there was the thing. Not success with all its illusions, not fame and its disappointment, but to care for nobody and to show vigorous affirmation of the worth of life by living it; also by damning anything which distracted him from life itself. It is no poem, that, which those who know poetry by square and rule write reams about. But it contains the spirit of the man. And how much would the man care that "Clarinda resented Sylvander's defection as an unpardonable wrong," to quote a commentator? For the matter of that, compare the divine energy of "I Hae a Wife o' My Ain," with the poem Clarinda inspired, and, to that extent be your own judge of poetic merits. Which will stand the test of memory? Just turn to "I Hae a Wife" again and after reading it read the Clarinda poem following. Which of the two awakens in you the sentiments the poet felt when he wrote his song?

#### SYLVANDER TO CLARINDA

Fair Empress of the Poet's soul  
And Queen of Poetesses,  
Clarinda take this little boon,  
This humble pair of glasses;

And fill them up with generous juice,  
As generous as your mind;  
And pledge them to the generous toast;  
"The whole of human kind!"

"To those who love us!" second fill;  
But not to those whom *we* love,  
Lest we love those who love not us!  
A third:—"To thee and me, love!"

You get another example of ecstasy in the song "O' A' the Airts," a product of his new-found freedom. There needs be no critic to point out its excellence, for the most unlearned man will see for himself that it is no artificial structure, that there is no stiffness of affectation. It is the work of a sound-minded, clear-headed man gifted by the gods to voice the sentiments of all humanity.

#### OF A' THE AIRTS

Of a' the airts the wind can blaw  
I dearly like the west,  
For there the bonie lassie lives,  
The lassie I lo'e best.  
There wild woods grow, and rivers row,  
And monie a hill between,  
But day and night my fancy's flight  
Is ever wi' my Jean.

I see her in the dewy flowers—  
I see her sweet and fair.  
I hear her in the tunefu' birds—  
I hear her charm the air.  
There's not a bonie flower that springs  
By fountain, shaw, or green,  
There's not a bonie bird that sings,  
But minds me o' my Jean.

Burns wrote in a letter to Dr. Blacklock,

I cannot conclude, without telling you that I am more and more pleased with the step I took regarding my Jean. Two things, from my happy experience, I set down as apophthegms in life: "A wife's head is immaterial, compared with her heart"—and—"Virtue's (for wisdom, what poet pretends to it?) ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

This, too, was inspired by Jean in those days.

### O POORTITH CAULD

*(Cold Poverty)*

O Poortith cauld and restless Love,  
Ye wrack my peace between ye!  
Yet poortith a' I could forgive,  
An't were na for my Jeanie.

The world's wealth when I think on,  
It's pride and a' the lave o't—  
My curse on silly coward man,  
That he should be the slave o't!

Her een sae bonie blue betray  
How she repays my passion;  
But prudence is her o'erword ay:  
She talks o' rank and fashion.

O, wha can prudence think upon,  
And sic a lassie by him?  
O, wha can prudence think upon,  
And sae in love as I am?

How blest the wild-wood Indian's fate!  
He woos his artless dearie—  
The silly bogles, Wealth and State,  
Can never make him eerie.

### *Chorus*

O, why should Fate sic pleasure have,  
Life's dearest bands untwining?

Or why sae sweet a flower as love  
Depend on Fortune's shining?

So the year 1788 ended with Robert Burns living in a finer atmosphere, knowing a life not sterile as had been the period through which he had passed. He had a living and earnest purpose, for the land-hungry man had set both feet on solid earth again. He knew the stimulus that leads to self-activity.

On June 12th he took possession of his farm in Ellisland, in Dumfriesshire, and the miserable house on the place excited him, not to complainings and bewailings, but to a humorous rhymed epistle to his friend Hugh Parker. He tells of the manner in which he sits "hid in an atmosphere of reek [smoke]," and how his mare, Jenny Geddes, wanders spiritless by the Nith, wondering

Was it for this, wi' canny care,  
Thou bure the bard through many a shire? (bore)  
At howes or hillocks never stumbled (hollows)  
And late or early never grumbled?

With so rackety a house Burns and his wife had to move to a place called The Isle, while a new house was a-building, and then they entered it, not in any dull and ordinary fashion, but with proper traditional rites, sending first salt and bread across the threshold according to the good old custom. Then the man went to it in real earnest, plowing and planting, touching up old songs, dipping a little into local politics, starting a reading circle among the neighborhood farmers and doing all with much gladness in his heart. He did not have to force himself into a cramped position. You get a vision of him in part of a letter written to Miss Chalmers, and in quoting patches it must be understood that nothing

is torn from a context that would add or diminish. I take the salient, pertinent passages.

I am here [Ellisland], driven in with my harvest folks by bad weather. . . . I am secure against that crushing grip of iron poverty, which, alas! is less or more fatal to the native worth and purity of, I fear, the noblest souls; and a late important step in my life has kindly taken me out of the way of those ungrateful iniquities, which, however overlooked in fashionable license, or varnished in fashionable phrase, are indeed but lighter and deeper shades of villainy.

Shortly after my last return to Ayrshire, I married "my Jean." This was not in consequence of the attachment of romance, perhaps; but I had a long- and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my determination and durst not trifle with so important a deposit. Nor have I any cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation; and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the county. Mrs. Burns believes, as firmly as her creed, that I am *le plus bel esprit, et le plus honnête homme* in the universe; although she scarcely ever in her life, except the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and the Psalms of David in meter, spent five minutes together either in prose or verse. I must except also, from this last, a certain late publication of Scots poems, which she has perused very devoutly; and all the ballads in the country, as she has (O the partial lover! you will cry) the finest "wood note wild" I ever heard. I am the more particular of this lady's character, as I know she will henceforth have the honor of a share in your best wishes. She is still at Mauchline, as I am building my own house; for this hovel that I shelter in, while occasionally here, is pervious to every blast that blows

and every shower that falls; and I am only preserved from being chilled to death by being suffocated with smoke. I do not find my farm that pennyworth I was taught to expect, but I believe, in time, it may be a saving bargain. . . .

He wrote to Gavin Hamilton,

My farm gives me a good many uncouth cares and anxieties, but I hate the language of complaint—Job, or some one of his friends, says, “Why should a living man complain?”

I wish the farmer great joy of his new acquisition to his family. . . . I cannot say that I give him joy of his life as a farmer. ’Tis, as a farmer paying a dear, unconscionable rent, a *cursed life*! As a laird farming his own property; sowing his own corn in hope; and reaping it, in spite of brittle weather, in gladness; knowing that none can say unto him, “what dost thou?”—fattening his herds; shearing his flocks; rejoicing at Christmas; and begetting sons and daughters, until he be the venerated, grey-haired leader of a little tribe—’tis a heavenly life! but Devil take the life of reaping the fruits that another must eat!

Still, Robert Burns enjoyed life, farm or no farm. There is reason to doubt whether his farming was his permanent pursuit although he tried to make himself believe that it was. Certainly never for any length of time could he have been all-engrossed with his farming. There is a tremendous correspondence to prove his occupation with non-farming. Nor would he refuse any invitation to an affair that promised jollity. A good instance is the affair of the Whistle, a curious custom with a curious tradition behind it. Great Britain has always had a healthy respect for its traditions and traditional customs, beating the bounds, the Dunmow fitch, pancake tossing at the Bluecoat school, Lord Mayor’s



show and one thing and another. A book could be written about them. Respect for tradition on one hand, and respect for individual judgment on the other makes for progress.

But to get on with the Whistle story, not that it has very much to do with the life of Burns, but because he himself became so interested, also because it is interesting. The legend ran, as Burns told it, that when James VI took Anne of Denmark to Scotland, in her party was a giant of a fellow, matchless in strength, in fight, in drinking and in everything else. He carried with him an ebony whistle and at any feast he would lay the whistle on the table and challenge one and all to drink, and the last man able to blow the whistle would be privileged to keep the trophy. But while many had tried, the giant had always marched off victor, leaving other challengers under the table. The great Dane had conquered the best drinkers in Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Poland and many other European countries. So at last came Scotland, and valiant men from John o' Groats to the Solway Firth entered the contest, but the Dane held the championship until a mighty bottle man, Sir Robert Laurie of Maxwellton, entered the field. Then came a contest the equal of which the world never saw. For three days and three nights the competitors emptied their bottles, and, lo, and behold! down went the mighty Dane, and Sir Robert "blew . . . his Requiem shrill." But Sir Robert lost the championship to his own son Sir Walter, and he, in his turn, lost it to his own brother-in-law, Walter Riddel of Glenriddel. So at last the trophy touched Robert Burns when, on Friday, October 16th, 1790, at Priar's-Carse the championship was again thrown open to the world. Reaching what might be called the documentary

stage, a Mr. M'Murdo became recorder and furnished this, which he calls the

## DOQUET

The original Bett between Sir Robert Laurie and Craigdarroch, for the noted Whistle, which is so much celebrated by Robert Burns's Poem—in which bett I was named Judge—1789.

The Bett decided at Carse—16th Octr, 1789.

Won by Craigdarroch—he drank ups. of 5 bottles of claret.

## Memorandum for the Whistle.

The Whistle gained by Sir Robert Laurie, (now) in possession of Mr. Riddel of Glenriddel is to be ascertained to the heirs of the said Sir Robert now existing, being Sir R. L., Mr. R. of G. and Mr. F. of C—is to be settled under the arbitration of Mr. Jn. M'Murdo: the business to be decided at Carse, the 16th of Octr, 1789.

(signed) Alex Ferguson.  
R. Laurie.  
Robt. Riddel.

Cowhill. 10th Octr. 1789.

Jn. M'Murdo accepts as Judge—

Geo Johnston witness to be present—

Patrick Miller witness to be pre. if possible.

Minute of Bett between Sir Robert Laurie and Craigdarroch. 1789.

Folks with a mind to documents will read further that one of the Burns documents, kept with religious care,—and Burns admirers are enthusiasts as relic hunters,—is an invitation card sent to Burns, on the back of which he scrawled this bit of doggerel:

The King's poor blackguard slave am I,  
And scarce can spare a minute;  
But I'll be with you by and by,  
Or else the devil's in it.

Further there is testimony by the blacksmith of Closeburn, one William Hunter, who, between whiles of shoeing horses, waited at the Riddel table. His tale runs:

Burns was present the whole evening. When the ladies had retired Burns withdrew from the dining table, and set down in a window looking down the River Nith; a small table was before him. During the evening Burns nearly emptied two bottle of spirits, the one of brandy, the other of rum, mixing them with warm water. He had pen, ink and paper before him and continued to write the whole evening. He seemed to have little conversation with the three gentlemen. I think he was composing the Whistle. About sunrise the two gentlemen were carried to bed. Craigharroch walked himself up-stairs. Burns, after he had assisted the two gentlemen to bed, walked to his own farmhouse at Ellisland. He seemed little the worse of drink, but he was quite able to walk . . . He now and then wrote on the paper, and while the gentlemen were sober, he turned round often and chatted with them, but drank none of the claret which they were drinking. I heard him read aloud several parts of the poem, much to the amusement of the three gentlemen.

The ballad is amusing enough, though that silly idolatry which admires everything, good, bad and indifferent, to be found in a book with the name Burns upon it, has sometimes set it in too high a place. Here are some sample stanzas:

I sing of a Whistle, a Whistle of worth.  
I sing of a Whistle, the pride of the North,  
Was brought to the court of our good Scottish King,  
And long with this Whistle all Scotland shall ring.

Old Loda, still rueing the arm of Fingal,  
The God of the Bottle sends down from his hall:

"This Whistle's your challenge, to Scotland get o'er,  
And drink then to Hell, Sir! or ne'er see me more!"

. . . . .

Three joyous good fellows, with hearts clear of flaw;  
Craigdarroch, so famous for wit, worth and law;  
And trusty Glenriddel, so skilled in old coins;  
And gallant Sir Robert, deep-read in old wines.

Craigdarroch began, with a tongue smooth as oil,  
Desiring Glenriddel to yield up the spoil;  
Or else he would muster the heads of the clan,  
And once more, in claret, try which was the man.

"By the gods of the ancients!" Glenriddel replies,  
"Before I surrender so glorious a prize,  
I'll conjure the ghost of the great Rorie More,  
And bumper his horn with him twenty times o'er."

Sir Robert, a soldier, no speech would pretend,  
But he ne'er turn'd his back, on his foe or his friend;  
Said:—"Toss down the Whistle, the prize of the field."  
And, knee-deep in claret, he'd die ere he'd yield.

To the board of Glenriddel our heroes repair,  
So noted for drowning of sorrow and care;  
But for wine and for welcome not more known to fame,  
Than the sense, wit, and taste, of a sweet lovely dame.

A Bard was selected to witness the fray,  
And tell future ages the feats of the day;  
A Bard who detested all sadness and spleen,  
And wish'd that Parnassus a vineyard had been.

The dinner being over, the claret they ply,  
And ev'ry new cork is a new spring of joy;  
In the bands of old friendship and kindred so set,  
And the bands grew the tighter the more they were wet.

. . . . .

Six bottles a-piece had well wore out the night,  
When gallant Sir Robert, to finish the fight,

Turn'd o'er in one bumper a bottle of red,  
And swore't was the way that their ancestors did.

Then worthy Glenriddel, so cautious and sage,  
No longer the warfare ungodly would wage:  
A high Ruling Elder to wallow in wine!  
He left the foul business to folks less divine.

The gallant Sir Robert fought hard to the end;  
But who can with Fate and quart bumpers contend?  
Though Fate said a hero should perish in light;  
So uprose fair Phoebus—and down fell the knight.

Next uprose our Bard, like a prophet in drink:—  
“Craigdarroch, thou'lt soar when creation shall sink!  
But if thou would flourish immortal in rhyme,  
Come—one bottle more—and have at the sublime!

“Thy line, that have struggled for freedom with Bruce,  
Shall heroes and patriots ever produce;  
So thine be the laurel, and mine be the bay;  
The field thou hast won by yon bright light of Day!”

For close-hearted fellowship in that period, Burns had a man of Falstaffian humor and girth, a Captain Grose, whose bent was towards antiquarian research. That was just the proper thing for Robert Burns, with his mind so set on old tales and old songs.

I have seen somewhere an old print entitled “Burns and Captain Grose.” Grose, a very fat man and the soul of good nature, has flung himself in a chair, and Burns stands behind him. The antiquarian and Burns have been examining old books, while tempering research with good fellowship apparently, if a jug on the floor contains spirits. But the attention of the men has turned to other things and a couple of lassies are displaying armor, and swords and claymores.

In honor of Grose, Burns broke into merry song:

Hear, Land o' Cakes, and brither Scots  
 Frae Maidenkirk to Johnie Groat's,  
 If there's a hole in a' your coats,  
     I rede you tent it: (counsel...attend)  
 A chield's amang you takin notes, (fellow is)  
     And faith he'll prent it:

. . . . .

By some auld, houlet-haunted biggin, (owl...building)  
 Or kirk deserted by its riggin, (roof)  
 It's ten to ane ye'll find him snug in  
     Some eldritch part, (unholy)  
 Wi' deils, they say, Lord safe's colleaguin (conspiracy)  
     At some black art.

. . . . .

It's tauld he was a sodger bred,  
 And ane wad rather fa'n than fled; (fallen)  
 But now he's quat the spurtle-blade (quitted...sword)  
     And dog-skin wallet, (knapsack)  
 And taen the—Antiquarian trade,  
     I think they call it.

He has a fouth o' auld nick-nackets (abundance)  
 Rusty airn caps and jinglin jackets (iron)  
 Wad haud the Lothians three in tackets (keep...shoe-nails)  
     A towmont guid; (twelvemonth)  
 And parritch-pats and auld saut-backets (salt-boxes)  
     Before the Flood.

Out of that association with Grose grew the poem "Tam o' Shanter," the narrative force of which will hold a lad's attention once he has mastered the vernacular, as closely as Macaulay's tale of "Horatio at the Bridge." The spirit of Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is in it. The first dozen lines grip because of their sincere ring and the incisiveness of expression, and the hold never lessens. You have a clear cut picture of a group of fellows in the village inn, one of them unwilling to face the long ride with a scolding wife at the end of it.



When chapmen billies leave the street, (pedlar lads)  
 And drouthy neibors meet (thirsty)  
 As market days are wearin' late  
 An' folks begin to tak the gate; (take the road)  
 While we sit bousing at the nappy, (ale)  
 An' getting fou and unco happy (full finely)  
 We think nae on the lang Scots miles,  
 The mosses, waters, slaps and styles  
 That lie between us and our hame,  
 Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,  
 Gathering her brows like gathering storm,  
 Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

It is better than listening to Harry Lauder to hear Burns, with his sweet sarcastic humor, tell of Tam's scolding wife and her predictions, when, intent on interest, the poet says, "but to our tale," and makes a picture of Tam in the inn, by the blazing fire, his chum the shoemaker at his side, the ale growing better with every glass, while outside the storm rages and sets the windows a-rattle.

But to our tale; As market night,  
 Tam had got planted unco right, (uncommonly)  
 Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely, (fireside, blazing)  
 Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely; (foaming ale)  
 And at his elbow, Souter Johnny, (shoemaker)  
 His ancient, trusty, drouthy cronie;  
 Tam lo'ed him like a very brither; (loved)  
 They had been fou for weeks thegither.  
 The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter,  
 And aye the ale was growing better;  
 The landlady and Tam grew gracious,  
 Wi' secret favours, sweet, and precious;  
 The souter tauld his queerest stories;  
 The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:  
 The storm without might rair and rustle, (roar)  
 Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,  
 E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy.  
 As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure, (loads)  
 The minutes win'd their way wi' pleasure;  
 Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,  
 O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

But Tam must go no matter how much the wind blew or how the skies were lightning split, so out he went, mounted his gray mare Meg, and hastened through mud and water holding fast to his cap and more than a little afraid as he drew near Kirk-Alloway, "Whare ghaists and houlets nightly cry," then over the ford and past the fearful tree "Where Mungo's mither hanged hersel." And, the while, the world was fearful with thunderings and lightnings and Kirk-Alloway seemed to be a blaze of light, and noisy with the sound of music and singing and dancing. Tam, finely pot-valiant, urged his mare onward, and then

. . . Tam saw an unco sight! (strange)  
 Warlocks and witches in a dance!  
 Nae cotillon brent new frae France (brand new)  
 But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels  
 Put life and mettle in their heels.

A winnock-bunker in the east, (window seat)  
 There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast—  
 A touzie tyke, black, grim, and large! (shaggy dog)  
 To gie them music was his charge:  
 He screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl. (squeal)  
 Till roof and rafters a' did dirl. (ring)  
 Coffins stood round like open presses,  
 That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;  
 And by some devilish cantraip sleight (magic trick)  
 Each in its cauld hand held a light,  
 By which heroic Tam was able  
 To note upon the haly table (holy)

A murderer's banes in gibbet-airns; (-irons)  
 Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns;  
 A thief new-cuttet frae the rape—  
 Wi his last gasp his gab did gape  
 Five tamahawks, wi' bluid red-rusted;  
 Five scymitars, wi' murder crusted;  
 A garter, which a babe had strangled;  
 A knife, a father's throat had mangled,  
 Whom his ain son o' life bereft—  
 His gray hairs yet stack to the heft;  
 Wi' mair of horrible and awfu',  
 Which even to name wad be unlawfu'.

As Tammie glower'd, amaz'd and curious,  
 The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:  
 The piper loud and louder blew;  
 The dancers quick and quicker flew;  
 They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit, (linked)  
 Till ilka carlin swat and reekit, (beldam steamed)  
 And coost her duddies to the wark, (cast...rags...work)  
 And linkit at it in her sark! (tripped deftly...chemise)

Now Tam, O Tam! had thae been queans, (those...girls)  
 A' plump and strapping in their teens;  
 Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen, (greasy flannel)  
 Been snaw-white seventeen hunder linen!  
 Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair, (these trousers)  
 That ance were plush, o' gude blue hair,  
 I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies, (buttocks)  
 For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies! (maidens)

But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,  
 Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal, (withered...wear)  
 Louping and flinging on a crummock, (leaping...cudgel)  
 I wonder didna turn thy stomach.

But Tam kent what was what fu' brawlie; (full well)  
 There was a winsome wench and walie (choice)  
 That night enlisted in the core,  
 Lang after kent on Carrick shore  
 (For mony a beast to dead she shot, (death)

And perish'd mony a bonnie boat,  
 And shook baith meikle corn and bear, (barley)  
 And kept the country-side in fear.)  
 Her cutty-sark, o' Paisley harn (short-shift...coarse linen)  
 That while a lassie she had worn,  
 In longitude tho' sorely scanty,  
 It was her best, and she was vauntie.— (proud)  
 Ah! little kent thy reverend grannie  
 That sark she coft for her wee Nannie (bought)  
 Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches) (pounds)  
 Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches!

But here my Muse her wing maun cour; (stop)  
 Sic flights are far beyond her pow'r—  
 To sing how Nannie lap and flang, (leapt...kicked)  
 (A souple jade she was, and strang);  
 And how Tam stood, like ane bewitch'd,  
 And thought his very een enrich'd;  
 Even Satan glowr'd, and fidg'd fu' fain, (fidgeted with fondness)  
 And hotch'd and blew wi' might and main: (jerked)  
 Till first ae caper, syne anither, (then)  
 Tam tint his reason a' thegither, (lost)  
 And roars out "Weel done, Cutty-sark!" (short-shift)  
 And in an instant all was dark!  
 And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,  
 When out the hellish legion sallied.

As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke (fret)  
 When plundering herds assail their byke, (herd-boys...nest)  
 As open pussie's mortal foes (the hare's)  
 When pop! she starts before their nose;  
 As eager runs the market-crowd,  
 When "Catch the thief!" resounds aloud;  
 So Maggie runs; the witches follow,  
 Wi' mony an eldritch shriech and hollo. (weird screech)

Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin'!  
 In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'!  
 In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin'!  
 Kate soon will be a woefu' woman!

Now do thy speedy utmost, Meg,  
 And win the key-stane o' the brig:  
 There at them thou thy tail may toss,  
 A running stream they darena cross,  
 But ere the key-stane she could make,  
 The fient a tail she had to shake!  
 For Nannie, far before the rest,  
 Hard upon noble Maggie prest,  
 And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle; (endeavor)  
 But little wist she Maggie's mettle!  
 Ae spring brought off her master hale, (whole)  
 But left behind her ain gray tail;  
 The carlin caught her by the rump, (clutched)  
 And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,  
 Ilk man and mother's son, take heed;  
 Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd,  
 Or cutty-sark rin in your mind,  
 Think! ye may buy the joys o'er dear;  
 Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

The man Burns could sing again because he was himself and among the scenes and people familiar from infancy. He could read aloud to Jean, and to his cronies at the inn, and as he read his ear became his guide and critic. But by no stretch of imagination can he be imagined reading "Tam o' Shanter" aloud to Clarinda, or to Buchan. In that sort of company he was a man alone and lonely. He knew no real fellowship, only casual acquaintance. Everywhere, in the city, he ran against men with conventions and received opinions, not the same prejudices that he had fought against and fled from, but conventions of a different sort and equally distasteful to those of the kirk-sessions. He might, and did compose metrical things when in that uncongenial company, but he found no inspiration. He knew no exuberant fertility.

That difference between composition and inspiration has been put in a very final way by Shelley in his "Defence of Poetry."

A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry"—the greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is like a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakes to transitory brightness. The power arises from within, like the color of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. When composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline.

But to our tale, as Burns says. August 18th, 1789, Jean bore a boy who was named Francis Wallace, and about that time Robert Burns received his appointment as excise gauger. He was what we might call today a prohibition officer in a country riddled with bootlegging, and he himself, at heart, wholly for freedom. His salary largely depended upon a percentage of the fines imposed upon violators of the law, and, he says somewhere, "I do not intend to seek honor from my profession,"—which may mean several things, as, for instance that there could be no honor in the job, or that he did not intend to rise very high by gaining a reputation as a diligent officer. However, needs must where the devil drives, and the farm gave no indication of munificent returns. Farms are that way, especially when managed by poets and philosophers.

Moreover, not depravity but economic urge drove men to the making of liquor just as it does with us today when the grape harvest from an acre will not bring enough to repay for the work done if sold in the open



market, but gives handsome returns when turned into good honest wine. So Robert Burns' soul revolted at

Searching auld wives' barrels—  
 Och hone! the day!  
 That clarty barm should stain my laurels,  
 But—what 'ill ye say?

but

These movin things ca'ed wives an' weans,  
 Wad move the very hearts o' stanes.

They say, those expatriated Highlanders in the Argentine, they say that Burns had a collie named Thurlow, as well known as the moon, which had the habit of running ahead of his master by a quarter of a mile and more, so that many a wrong-doer had fair and ample warning of the approach of the exciseman and all was clear when Burns arrived. They say, too, that on a fair day he went to Auld Katie's house at a time when Kate's brew was the talk of the neighborhood. And Kate was at home when Exciseman Burns came. He put his head in at the door and said, "Kate, is it fou ye are? Dinna ye ken that the supervisor and I'll be on ye in forty minutes mair?" So Kate went free and the share of the fine that Burns might have had he did not have, to his exceeding comfort. Then there was the case of Janet, whose home-brew was the best in all that parish. To her place went Burns, and she, thinking him to be a customer, hastened to set drink before him. But he condemned the stuff as unfit for a gaberlunzie, and an insult to an exciseman.

"God help me, mon! Are ye an excise? But ye'll surely nae inform on a puir auld body wi' nae other means o' leevin' than sellin' a wee drappie home-brew?"

“But I have na seen the brewin’ yet, woman,” answered Burns. “I’ll be lookin’ in on my way back frae the fair, so be ready.”

But never was yet a national hero who was not counted as a friend to the poor, be he poet or outlaw, and all the excise stories have much the same ring. What concerns us most closely is that few songs came as the result of his employment, nor indeed could it be expected that they would, considering the fact that his duties carried him over ten parishes, that he rode about two hundred miles a week, and that his salary amounted to no more than sixty pounds in the year, so that there was always that nightmare of poverty with him.

Meantime, while he rode about the country, the farm property began to slide downwards, and it is doubtful whether anything on earth can go to ruin with the rapidity of a farm. He was of almost telegraphic brevity when writing to his brother Gilbert about it. “This farm has undone by enjoyment of myself. It is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go to hell! I’ll fight it out and be off with it.” So the year 1790 dragged its slow length with Burns at his excise rounds and nothing in a poetic way being done except an “Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson,” and—here the “nothing” and the “except” are eliminated because of that one glorious poem of which mention has been made—“Tam o’ Shanter.” I name only the chief of his poems when I speak of his production. Actually a steady stream poured from his pen, songs, ballads, elegies, communications in rhyme, and always letters, letters, letters. And these minor poems are well worth while, especially to a song-lover in a day when the popular songs seem to be the

result of rivalry between ineptitude and silliness. Take this for example:

WHAT CAN A YOUNG LASSIE DO  
WI' AN AULD MAN

What can a young lassie,  
What shall a young lassie,  
What can a young lassie  
Do wi' an auld man?  
Bad luck on the penny  
That tempted my minnie  
To sell her puir Jenny  
For siller an' lan'!

He's always compleenin  
Frae mornin to eenin;  
He hoasts and he hirples  
The weary day lang;  
He's doylt and he's dozin;  
His blude it is frozen—  
O dreary's the night  
Wi' a crazy auld man!

He hums and he hankers,  
He frets and he cankers,  
I never can please him  
Do a' that I can.  
He's peevish and jealous  
Of a' the young fellows—  
O, dool on the day  
I met wi' an auld man!

My auld auntie Katie  
Upon me taks pity,  
I'll do my endeavour  
To follow her plan:  
I'll cross him an' wrack him  
Until I heartbreak him,  
And then his auld brass  
Will buy me a new pan.

Also there were invitations to write this and that, as when the noble but intellectually ignoble Earl of Buchan wrote to Burns in his silly stilted style, saying:

Go across the country, and meet the Tweed at the nearest point from your farm; and wandering along the pastoral bank of Thomson's pure parent stream, catch inspiration on the devious walk, till you find Lord Buchan sitting on the ruins of Dryburgh. There the commendator will give you a hearty welcome, and try to light the poetic lamp at the pure flame of native genius, upon the altar of Caledonian virtue.

Burns replied with his "Address to the Shade of Thomson." And yet justice must be done to the pompous Buchan. Essaying poetry to express his appreciation of Burns, he made it clear that he had his sincere regrets that he did not do all that might have been done for the poet.

#### ADDRESS TO THE SHADE OF BURNS

Poet of Coila, here at Wallace' feet,  
Thy generous Muse, thy manly soul I greet,  
Thy soul, now severed from a servile crew,  
And blest, united to the chosen few!  
Too late I found thee, to redeem thy days  
From bloated joys, and ill-directed lays;  
But now I come, even with my setting sun,  
To see to thee some tardy justice done.  
Upon thy Bust, as once on Thomson's, I  
Impose this chaplet, with a genial sigh;  
And may our brave, unconquer'd country's fire  
Still glow in song, and sparkle from her Lyre!

So we come to the luckless month of March, 1791, with a gem of an impromptu letter written to John Ballantine, and after that all kinds of worry, with the Fates playing fast and loose with the man.

First the letter, which has to do with the inception of that world-popular "Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon." It runs:

While here I sit, sad and solitary, by the side of a fire in a little country inn, and drying my wet clothes, in pops a poor fellow of a sodger, and tells me he is going to Ayr. By heavens! say I to myself, with a tide of good spirits, which the magic of that sound "Auld Toon o' Ayr" conjured up, I will send my last song to Mr. Ballantine. Here it is:

Ye flowery banks o' bonie Doon,  
How can ye blume sae fair?  
How can ye chaunt, ye little birds,  
And I sae fu' o' care!"

Now I have read many a "Robert Burns" in the school books, and more than once I have seen the statement made that it is idle to look for a chain of connection between Burns' affairs and his songs. But consider the song; you will discover beauty in it while considering. However, consider it from its human aspect and what it might mean.

#### THE BANKS O' DOON

Ye banks and braes o' bonie Doon,  
How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair?  
How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
And I sae weary fu' o' care!  
Thou'll break my heart, thou warbling bird  
That wantons thro' the flowering thorn!  
Thou minds me o' departed joys,  
Departed never to return.

Aft hae I rov'd by bonie Doon  
To see the rose and woodbine twine,  
And ilka bird sang o' its luve,  
And fondly sae did I o' mine.

Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,  
Fu' sweet upon its thorny tree!  
And my fause luvver staw my rose—  
But ah! he left the thorn wi' me.

But see the man so sore beset, his wet clothes steaming as they dried on his body. See him in one of those moments of stress and pressure that come to all men. See him and imagine him thinking of Jean the patient, the tolerant, the sympathetic, on the luckless farm, expecting within a few weeks another child to be born to her. But that is not all. There is a girl, "Anna with the gowden locks," of the Globe tavern in Dumfries, also, expecting, within a few weeks, the birth of a child of which Robert Burns was the father. So read the poem again to see the poet, not bemoaning his own sorrows but stung to the heart for the grief of his partner.

And, wonder of wonders! Saw ever the world a woman less afraid of the criticism of others! Did ever before a woman act in such naturalness? What did Jean do but take the child of Anna Park of the Globe tavern and raise it with her own, in the same cradle, for the two were only ten days apart in age. And, it is said, when her father, old Armour, came to the house and saw the two in the cradle, and when he asked whether she had twins again, the jewel among women made answer, saying, "'Tis a neebor's bairn who is unweel." Jean's was a soul that embraced the universe.

And hear Robert Burns as he tells Mrs. Dunlop all about it in a letter, for the man always was throwing open the book of his life.

I am once more able, my honored friend, to return you with my own hands, thanks for the many instances of your friendship, and particularly for your



kind anxiety in this last disaster that my evil genius had in store for me. However, life is chequered—joy and sorrow—for on Saturday morning last, Mrs. Burns made me a present of a fine boy; rather stouter, but not so handsome as your godson was at his time of life. Indeed I look on your little namesake to be my *chef d'oeuvre* in that species of manufacture, as I look on “Tam o’ Shanter” to be my standard performance in the poetical line. ’Tis true, both the one and the other discover a spice of roguish waggery, that might perhaps be as well spared; but then they also show, in my opinions, a force of genius and finishing polish, that I despair of ever excelling. Mrs. Burns is getting stout again, and laid as lustily about her to-day at breakfast, as a reaper from the cornridge. That is the peculiar privilege and blessing of our hale and sprightly damsels, that are bred among the *hay and heather*. We cannot hope for that highly polished mind, that charming delicacy of soul, which is found among the female world in the more elevated stations of life, and which is certainly by far the most bewitching charm in the famous cestus of Venus. It is indeed such an inestimable treasure, that where it can be had in its native heavenly purity, unstained by some one or other of the many shades of affectation, and unalloyed by some one or other of the many species of caprice, I declare to Heaven, I should think it cheaply purchased at the expense of every other earthly good! But as this angelic creature is, I am afraid, extremely rare in any station and rank of life, and totally denied to such a one as mine, we meaner mortals must put up with the next rank of female excellence. As fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever; rustic, native grace; unaffected modesty, and unsullied purity; nature’s mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste; a simplicity of soul, unsuspicious of, because unacquainted with, the crooked ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world; and the dearest charm of all the

rest—a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love in our part, and ardently glowing with more than equal return; these, with a healthy frame, a sound, vigorous constitution, which your higher ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely women in my humble walks of life.

This is the greatest effort my broken arm has yet made. Do let me hear, by first post, how *cher petit Monsieur* comes on with his small pox. May Almighty goodness preserve and restore him! R. B.

Throwing light on the way of a man with a maid, at least the way of Robert Burns, I include a song that Burns made for, and to Anna of the Golden Locks, one which Thomson refused to include in the collection. It must be plain to anyone that Robert Burns made his songs as he wrote his letters, suiting the mood and the manner to his recipient. As in the case of "The Whistle," you get something of the quality of the man, reading him in his many moods, and to reveal the quality of him as best I can is my task. He bestrode on occasion a "spurr-galled, spavined Pagasus," he says.

#### YESTREEN I HAD A PINT O' WINE

Yestreen I had a pint o' wine,  
 A place where body saw na;  
 Yestreen lay on this breast o' mine  
 The gowden locks of Anna. (golden)

The hungry Jew in wilderness  
 Rejoicing o'er his manna  
 Was naething to my hiney bliss (honey)  
 Upon the lips of Anna!

Ye monarchs take the East and West  
 Frae Indus to Savannah:

Gie me within my straining grasp  
The melting form of Anna!

There I'll despise Imperial charms,  
An Empress or Sultana,  
While dying raptures in her arms  
I give and take wi' Anna!

Awa, thou flaunting God of Day!  
Awa, thou pale Diana!  
Ilk Star, gae hide thy twinkling ray,  
When I'm to meet my Anna!

Come, in thy raven plumage Night  
(Sun, Moon, and Stars, withdrawn a'),  
And bring an Angel-pen to write  
My transports with my Anna!

*Postscript*

The Kirk an' State may join, and tell,  
To do sic things I maunna:  
The Kirk an' State may gae to Hell,  
And I'll gae to my Anna.

She is the sunshine o' my e'e,  
To love but her I canna:  
Had I on earth but wishes three,  
The first should be my Anna.

The broken arm to which he makes reference in the Dunlop letter was a result of a fall from a horse, and he seems to have made light of it. But with one thing and another it seemed high time to close the Ellisland chapter, so he went to the farm, got rid of things, lock, stock and barrel, and told Thomas Sloan all about it thus:

I sold my crop on this day se'ennight past, and sold it very well. A guinea an acre, on an average, above value. But such a scene of drunkenness was hardly ever seen in this country. After the roup was over,

about thirty-three people engaged in a battle, every man for his own hand, and fought it out for three hours. Nor was the scene much better in the house. No fighting indeed, but folks lying drunk on the floor, and decanting until both my dogs got so drunk by attending them that they could not stand. You will easily guess how I enjoyed the scene; as I was no farther over than you used to see me.

That is dated September 1st, 1791. And as might be expected, there were many of the "I told you so" sort. "How could the man miss but fail?" said a neighborhood farmer. "He brought with him a bevy of servants from Ayrshire, an' the lassies did nothing but bake bread, while the lads sat by the fireside and ate it and drank ale."

Then Jean the level-headed looks at things as soon as they have settled in Dumfries, and you see her with her chin lifted high, telling Mr. M'Diarmid that all is well so long as people do not meddle or pretend to pity them, or come with head-shakings saying that Robert was a failure. She said:

We did not come empty handed to Dumfries. The Ellisland sale was a very good one, and was well-attended. A cow in her first calf brought eighteen guineas, and the purchaser never rued his bargain. Two other cows brought good prices. They had been given us by Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop. Robert Burns neither failed as a farmer nor in any other capacity. At Martinmas, 1791, he went to Dumfries, taking lodgings in Bank street. His pay as exciseman never went to more than seventy pounds and he got that as Port-officer.

And, as might be expected Robert Burns had an attack of the blues, being cooped up in a town, living in three small rooms with one "about the size of a

bed-closet" for his own use. On the floor below lived John Syme who was "stamp distributor," and above lived John Haugh, a blacksmith, and across the street was the home of Captain Hamilton, who often invited Burns to a family Sunday dinner. So comes the Burns protest mostly in a minor key but ending as usual with a sudden upward leap.

To Robert Ainslie, Esqr., Edinburgh.

Dumfries, Nov. 1791.

My dear Ainslie,—Can you minister to a mind diseased? Can you, amid the horrors of penitence, regret, remorse, headache, nausea, and all the rest of the hounds of hell that beset a poor wretch who has been guilty of the sin of drunkenness—can you speak peace to a troubled soul?

*Miserable perdu* that I am! I have tried everything that used to amuse me, but in vain: here must I sit, a monument of vengeance laid up in store for the wicked, slowly counting every click of the clock as it slowly—slowly, numbers over these lazy scoundrels of hours who (d—n them!) are ranked up before me, everyone of his neighbor's backside, and every one with a burden of anguish on his back, to pour on my devoted head—and there is none to pity me. My wife scolds me! my business torments me, and my sins come staring me in the face, every one telling a more bitter tale than his fellow. When I tell you, even . . . has lost its power to please, you will guess something of my hell within, and all around me. I began "Elibanks and Elibraes," but the stanzas fell unenjoyed and unfinished from my listless tongue; at last I luckily thought of reading over an old letter of yours that lay by me in my book case, and I felt something, for the first time since I opened my eyes, of pleasurable existence. Well—I begin to breathe a little since I began to write to you. How are you, and what are you doing? How goes law? Apropos, for



connection's sake do not address me as "Supervisor," for that is an honor I cannot pretend to—I am on the list, as we call it, for a Supervisorship, and will be called out by and by to act as one; but at present, I am a simple Gauger, tho' t'other day I got an appointment to an excise division of 25 pounds *per ann.* better than the rest. My present income, down money, is 70 pounds *per ann.* . . .

In such circumstances the world would consider it fantastic and sentimental for a poverty-stricken poet to have erected, and to pay for a monument over the grave of Robert Ferguson, but that very thing the glorious spendthrift did at a cost of five pounds and ten shillings, and Robert Burn, architect, who took two years to do the job, "had the hardness to ask me interest on the sum," says Burns, "but, considering that the money was due me by one poet for putting a tombstone over another, he may, with grateful surprise, thank Heaven that ever he saw a farthing of it."

Also he managed to surmount difficulties when inspiration came, as he told Thomson in a letter.

My way is—I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression; then choose my theme; begin one stanza; when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature around me that are in unison and harmony with the cogitations of my fancy and workings of my bosom; humming every now and then the air with the verses I have framed. When I feel my Muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swing at intervals on the hind legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures as my pen goes on.



And then, too, there is information given by Cunningham.

While he lived in Dumfries he had three favourite walks—on the Dockgreen by the river-side; among the ruins of Lincluden College; and towards the Martindon-ford, on the north side of the Nith. This latter place was secluded, commanded a view of the distant hills and the romantic towers of Lincluden, and afforded soft greensward banks to rest upon, within sight and sound of the stream. As soon as he was heard to hum to himself, his wife saw that he had something in his mind and was prepared to see him snatch up his hat, and set silently off for his musing-ground. When by himself, and in the open air, his ideas arranged themselves in their natural order—words came at will, and he seldom returned without having finished a song. . . . When the verses were finished, he passed them through the ordeal of Mrs. Burns's voice, listened attentively when she sang; asked her if any of the words were difficult; and when one happened to be too rough, he readily found a smoother; but he never, save at the resolute entreaty of a scientific musician, sacrificed sense to sound. The autumn was his favourite season, and the twilight his favourite hour of study.

## PART VIII

### The Curtains of the Night

**I**N those days, meaning the year 1792, and a few years previous and a few later taking it by and large, the world seemed very full of peril of a political kind. That is to say, it was very much as it is now and always has been except for a few patches of time when men seem to have been resting to gain greater strength to enable them to leap at each other's throats. There had not been wanting lofty souls who pointed a way of social progress and political wisdom, but, overwhelmed with a monstrous debt, overdriven and overtaxed, the French people were ready for leaders who would show the way to well-being. Yet visions of national rejuvenation soon blurred, and there were bifurcations and divisions endlessly, each leader striving for mastery and power. And France, being central, had the eyes of the world upon her. Great things had been expected of the revolutionary committee which replaced the city council in Paris after the insurrection of July, 1789. Robespierre was regarded as one to make a vital change in Paris, in France, in Europe. The nobles had emigrated in the winter of 1789, and, a year or so later, the news ran round the world that the silver and gold plate used in the churches of France had been transferred to the mint and coined, and so perfection in human affairs, it was thought, must surely come with the double yoke of the aristocracy and the church taken from the necks of the people. Then the king and the queen and the royal

family were arrested in their flight, on the memorable twenty-first of June, 1791, and Louis, a prisoner, sanctioned the National Constitution. Dreamers and enthusiasts spoke of the light that came from France, and how the warmth of it would touch the uttermost limits of mankind, and all that sort of thing. They were still further assured of more widespread human happiness when they looked at America, where the Quakers of Philadelphia had liberated their slaves on New Year's Day of 1788, and where, a year later, a new government had been organized on March 4th, 1789, with George Washington the first president and an act protecting native industry safely passed.

Then there were a thousand little things talked about, things which knowing people said made for progress and happiness for Hob and Nob, as that Mr. Tytler had ascended in a balloon inflated with smoke of burnt straw and wool in Edinburgh, and Blanchard and Jeffries had crossed the straits of Dover in a hydrogen-filled balloon, and so men talked about the conquest of the air; and Africa was being opened up by the explorer Bruce, and by the settlements at Sierra Leone, and so men talked about new lands for excess population and the happiness for mankind that must ensue, never dreaming that exploration and the science of map-making would lead to the spoliation and enslavement of Africa, or that its partition and exploitation and plundering would lead to most bloody wars down to our own day, Zulu wars, Boer wars, Afghan wars, Egyptian wars, Riff wars, Soudan wars, and occupations and jealousies and punitive expeditions and international chicaneries. Men talked about the new era of progress because Mr. Murdoch, in Cornwall, had used coal gas for illuminating

purposes; they predicted a time of wiser and better living because a bankrupt had been refused his clearance after it was found that he had lost five pounds at gambling, and someone pointed out that the profits of a gambling house in London amounted to a hundred and fifty thousand pounds and in one night a million of money had changed hands, therefore to prohibit gambling would turn men into hard-working citizens; they were happy because of the good that must enure to the human race through the coming swiftness in the transportation world since Watt had invented an expansion steam-engine, and Thomas Paine had proposed steam navigation in America in 1788, and Claude Comte de Jouffry had constructed an engine which propelled a boat on the Saône, and William Patrick Miller and his friend Symington had constructed a steamboat which traveled about four miles an hour; they discussed the "sure, quick and uniform" way of executing criminals by means of the newly-invented guillotine. Then there were those disasters and moving accidents which men seize upon as a nine days' wonder to forget easily, the trial of the people who ran the *Times* newspaper for libeling the Prince of Wales, the trial of Thomas Paine for libels in his "The Rights of Man," the trial of the world's most famous pickpocket, and of "Monster" Renwick Williams who stabbed women to death. There had been a very interesting execution when Christian Murphy was legally strangled rather than burnt for coining. There had been a riot in Birmingham to commemorate the French revolution and several houses had been burned. There had been a few exciting shipwrecks to satisfy those hungry for new excitement, as when the "Charlemont" packet between Holyhead and Dublin went down with more than a

hundred drowned, and when the frigate "Pandora" ran on a reef and a hundred were lost, and when the packet "Union," plying between Dover and Calais, was lost off the French shore most astonishingly because such a thing had not happened for a hundred years and men had talked of the perfect safety of sea travel. So things were very much as they are today.

As for Robert Burns, full of trials and troubles, in an environment that was a purgatory, determined to speak freely of what he thought to be good, and wholly in favor of letting his light shine out, he could have been no other than a revolutionist. Then this came to pass, by which he showed his sympathy in a practical, if hopeless way, with the republicans.

In the Solway Firth the smugglers did a thriving trade much as the rum-runners do across the twelve mile limit at sea, and over the lakes. One of these was the "Rosa-mund" which got into difficulties and ran ashore, thus becoming an easy capture. She was sold at Dumfries, with all her cargo, and one of the lots put up for sale was a group of four deck guns. We can do no more than guess with what gusto Robert Burns bid them in, and with what joy he despatched them to the French Legislative Assembly. There is little more than a hint in the Burns correspondence as to political views, or the lack of them, but that hint comes like low, melodious thunder in a letter to Captain William Johnstone, possibly intended for publication. One sees in Johnstone a sort of Oswald Garrison Villard, full of a sense of responsibility and refusing to subordinate his honest aims to the aim of enlarging his circulation. Writes Burns:

I have just read your Prospectus of the "Edinburgh Gazetteer." If you go on in your paper with



the same spirit, it will, beyond all comparison, be the first composition of the kind in Europe. I beg leave to insert my name as subscriber, and if you have already published any papers, please send me them from the beginning. Point out your own way in settling payments in this place, or I shall settle with you through the medium of my friend Peter Hill, book seller in Edinburgh.

Go on, Sir! Lay bare with undaunted heart and steady hand that horrid mass of corruption called politics and state-craft. Dare to draw in their native colors those "calm-thinking villains whom no faith can fire," whatever be the shibboleth of their pretended party. . . .

Presently came trouble because "some envious, malicious devil has raised a little demur on my political principles. . . . I have set, henceforth, a seal on my lips, as to these unlucky politics; but to you I must breathe my sentiments. In this, as in everything else, I shall show the undisguised emotions of my soul. War I deprecate; misery and ruin to thousands are in the blast that announces the destructive demon." That is in one of the Dunlop letters, and he says, five days later, to her, "since I finished the other sheet, the political blast that threatened my welfare is overblown. I have corresponded with Commissioner Graham, for the board had made me the subject of their animadversions; and now I have the pleasure of informing you that all is set to rights in that quarter. Now as to these informers, may the devil be let loose to—but hold."

So there were spies, and we have it on the authority of Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, a contemporary, that the charge of disloyalty against Burns arose incidentally when he went to the theater to see "As You Like It" played. Someone called for the singing of "God Save



the King," in the middle of a scene, and the actress, Miss Fontenelle, went to the footlights and sang. Instantly the house stood up and uncovered, (it would seem that they sat in the theater hatted), but Burns kept his seat, and his hat, so there were cries of "Turn him out!" and "Shame, Burns!" A second incident is told of by Burns himself, in a letter to Robert Graham:

I was in the playhouse one night when Ça Ira was called for. I was in the middle of the pit, and from the pit the clamor arose. One or two individuals, with whom I occasionally associate, were of the party, but I neither knew of the plot, nor joined in the plot, nor ever opened my lips either to hiss or huzza *that*, or any other political tune whatever. I looked on myself as far too obscure a man to have any weight in quelling a riot, and at the same time, as a character of higher respectability than to yell to the howling of a rabble. This was the conduct of all the first characters in the place; and these characters know, and will avow, that such was my conduct. I never uttered any invectives against the king. His private worth is altogether impossible that such a man as I can appreciate; but in his public capacity I always revered, and always will, with the soundest loyalty, revere the monarch of Great Britain, as (to speak in Masonic) the sacred keystone of our Royal Constitution.

That Burns was enjoying hugely his revolutionary game there can be no doubt. Life flows glowing and flashing for the young man who would reform the world. So full of fire he was that he could not refrain from stirring up the mild-mannered Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop with:

We in this country here have many alarms of the reforming, or rather, the republican spirit of your part of the kingdom. Indeed we are a good deal in

commotion ourselves. For me, I am a "placeman," you know—a very humble one indeed, Heaven only knows, but still so much as to gag me. What my private sentiments are, you will find out without an interpreter. . . . I have taken up the subject in another view; and the other day, for a pretty actress's benefit night, I wrote an address, which I will give you on the other page, called "The Rights of Women."

But he was an outspoken placeman, a poker-of-fun at his job, a derider, one trying to do what he had to do however distasteful the doing might be and still preserve his self-respect. His work, as he expressed it, was "grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner with the merciless wheel of the Excise." Mark, also, the ballad he composed and sang at an Excise Court dinner. We have his own letter to J. Leven, the General Supervisor at the Edinburgh excise office, testifying that it was thus composed. I mention the fact because there have been those who made a very delightful picture of Burns striding up and down the sea-sands, on guard with sword, making the song between periods of scanning the horizon for smugglers and rum-runners. Here it is in full:

THE DEIL'S AWA WI' TH' EXCISEMAN

*Chorus*

The Deil's awa, the Deil's awa,  
The Deil's awa wi' th' Exciseman!  
He's danc'd awa, he's danc'd awa,  
He's danc'd awa wi' the Exciseman!

The Deil cam fiddlin thro' the town,  
And danc'd awa wi' th' Exciseman,  
And ilka wife cries:—"Auld Mahoun,  
I wish you luck o' the prize, man!"

“We’ll mak our maut, and we’ll brew our drink,  
 We’ll laugh, sing, and rejoice, man,  
 And mony braw thanks to the meikle black Deil,  
 That danc’d awa wi’ th’ Exciseman.”

There’s threesome reels, there’s foursome reels,  
 There’s hornpipes and strathspeys, man,  
 But the ae best dance e’er cam to the land  
 Was *The Deil’s Awa wi’ th’ Exciseman*.

To the same Robert Graham, of the Board of Commissioners, Robert Burns had to make his apology and request for leniency, a letter that has caused more than one to say things about deficiency in dignity, and exhibition of humility and so on. For people will persist in standing on pedestals of superiority. But there was Burns in his cramped life, Jean with her hands full, for a girl had been born on November 21st, the children at a hungry age, and little or no money in the locker. If, by eating a little humble pie Robert Burns could keep the youngsters eating porridge, then Burns would eat the pie though every mouthful nearly choked him.

The humble pie letter, which is dated from Dumfries, December, runs:

I have been surprised, confounded and distracted by Mr. Mitchell, the Collector, telling me that he has received an order from your Board to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to government.

Sir, you are a husband and a father. You know what you would feel to see the much-loved wife of your bosom, and your helpless, prattling little ones turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost without the necessary support of a miserable existence. Alas! Sir, must I think that that will be my lot! and from the d—d

dark insinuations of hellish, groundless Envy too! I believe, Sir, I may aver it, and in the sight of Omniscience, that I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not even though worse horrors, if worse can be, than those I have mentioned, hung over my head, and I say that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie! To the British Constitution, on revolution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached! You, Sir, have been much and generously my friend. Heaven knows how warmly I have felt the obligation, and how gratefully I have thanked you. Fortune, Sir, has made you powerful, and me impotent; has given you patronage, and me dependence. I would not, for my single self, call on your humanity; were such my insular, unconnected situation, I would despise the tear that now swells in my eye—I could brave misfortune, I could face ruin; for at the worst, “Death’s thousand doors stand open”: but, good God! the tender concerns that I have mentioned, the claims and ties that I see at this moment, and feel around me, how they unnerve courage, and wither resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem as an honest man, I know is my due; to these, Sir, permit me to appeal, by these may I adjure you to save me from the misery which threatens to overwhelm me, and which, with my last breath I will say it, I have not deserved.

. . . . .

As to Reform Principles, I look upon the British Constitution, as settled at the Revolution, to be the most glorious Constitution on earth, or that perhaps the wit of man can frame; at the same time, I think—and you know what high and distinguished characters have for some time thought so—that we have a good deal deviated from the original principles of that Constitution; particularly, that an alarming system of corruption has pervaded in connection between the Executive power and the House of Commons.

This is the truth, and the whole truth, of my Reform opinions, which, before I was aware of the complexion of these innovating times, I, too unguardedly (now I see it) sported with; but henceforth I seal up my lips. However, I never dictated to, corresponded with, or had the least connection with any political Association whatever—except that when the magistrates and the principal inhabitants of this town met to declare their attachment to the Constitution, and their abhorrence of riot, which declaration you would see in the papers, I—as I thought my duty as a subject at large, and a citizen in particular, called upon me—subscribed the same declaratory creed.

Of Johnstone, the publisher of the “*Edinburgh Gazetteer*,” I know nothing. One evening, in company with four or five friends, we met with his Prospectus, which we thought manly and independent; and I wrote to him ordering his paper for us. If you think that I acted improperly in allowing his paper to come addressed to me, I shall immediately countermand it. I never, so judge me God! wrote a line of prose for the *Gazetteer* in my life. An occasional address, spoken by Miss Fontenelle on her benefit night here, which I called *The Rights of Woman*, I sent to the *Gazetteer*, as also some extempore stanzas on the commemoration of Thomson; both of these I will subjoin for your perusal. You will see that they have nothing whatever to do with politics. At the time when I sent Johnstone one of these poems (but which one I do not remember), I enclosed at the request of my warm and worthy friend, Robert Riddel, Esqr., of Glenriddel, a prose essay signed Cato, written by him, and addressed to the delegates for County Reform, of which he was one for this County. With the merits or demerits of that essay, I have nothing to do, further than transmitting it in the same frank, which frank he procured me.

As to France, I was her enthusiastic votary in the beginning of the business. When she came to show



her old avidity for conquest, in annexing Savoy, &c., to her dominions, and invading the rights of Holland, I altered my sentiments. A tippling ballad which I made, on Prince of Brunswick's breaking up his camp, and sung one convivial evening, I shall likewise send you, sealed up, as it is not for everybody's reading. This last is not worth your perusal; but lest Mrs. Fame should, as she has already done, use and even abuse her old privilege of lying, you shall be the master of everything, *le pour et le contre*, of my political writings and conduct.

This, my honored Patron, is all. To this statement I challenge disquisition. Mistaken prejudice, or unguarded passion, may mislead, and have often misled me; but when called on to answer for my mistakes, though—I will say it—no man can feel keener compunction for his errors, yet I trust, no man can be more superior to evasion or disguise.

I shall do myself the honor to thank Mrs. Graham for her goodness in a separate letter.

If, Sir, I have been so fortunate to do away with these misapprehensions of my conduct and character, I shall, with the confidence which you were wont to allow me, appeal to your goodness on every opening in the way of business where I think I with propriety may offer myself—An instance that occurs just now. Mr. M'Farlane, Supervisor of the Galloway district, is and has been for some time very ill. I spoke to Mr. Mitchell as to his wishes to forward my application for the job; but though he expressed, and ever does express, every kindness for me, he hesitates, in hopes that the disease may be of short continuance. However, as it seems to be a paralytic affection, I fear that it may be some time ere he can take charge of so extended a district. There is a great deal of fatigue and very little business in the district—two things suitable enough to my hardy constitution, and inexperience in that line of life.



I have the honor to be, Sir, your ever grateful, and  
highly obliged, humble servant,

Robt. Burns.

Again we see that as things are, so they were. The tale of the situation looks very much like a story of hysteria in our own place and time. There is a malignant mixture of patriotism and cunning abroad. There was something very much like the silly and sometimes ferocious suppression of opinion during war-time that made ourselves the laughingstock of sensible men, when psittacisms and catchwords seem to be the dominant thing.

But out of all that nonsense came a gem of sarcasm, too little known. It is a very short political catechism which Burns wrote to his friend Alec Cunningham, and runs:

*Quere.*—What is Politics?

*Ans.*—Politics is a science wherewith, by means of nefarious cunning and hypocritical pretence, we govern civil politics for the emolument of ourselves and adherents.

*Quere.*—What is a Minister?

*Ans.*—A minister is an unprincipled fellow, who, by the influence of hereditary or acquired wealth—by superior abilities, or by a lucky conjunction of circumstances, obtains a principal place in the administration of the affairs of government.

*Quere.*—What is a Patriot?

*Ans.*—A Patriot is an individual exactly of the same description as a Minister, but out of place.

In this connection again the men who regret have been busy. John Campbell Shairp, in his "Life of Burns," is especially severe on what he calls "the truculent way in which Burns flaunted defiance in the face of authority." But it is Burns and not the conservative

opinions of Mr. Shairp that interest. Burns was thus and so. He said what he thought with a simplicity not to be abashed. Being an individual personality, sharp-edged and trenchant, he hated authority of all kinds. "Here's to the last verse of the last chapter of the last Book of Kings!" he once gave as a toast at some social gathering, and Professor Shairp finds this reprehensible as a far-reaching avowal of democracy, but I read it as a humorous statement of a hope that each and every man may have his daily bread. And, when you come to think of it, the motive that impels every enemy of poverty and possible poverty is a daily-bread one.

Those eloquent and witty toasts brought trouble to Burns' door more than once, as when, at some public dinner someone drank to the health of William Pitt, up stood Burns, his glass raised high, and roared, "And here's to the health of a much greater man—George Washington." And, at a banquet, when England's victory over France was the subject of a toast, Burns must needs evoke dark lightnings by shouting, "May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause," which looks like bad taste, or has the appearance of a man with the finer edge gone from his judgment because of drink, there being decent soldiers present; and which might have been taken one way, but seems to have been taken the other, for a soldier made objection, and a duel, or a challenge to a duel seemed to be very near. At least so it is said. But Robert Burns fighting a duel! Or a common-sense soldier fighting Burns! The idea either way is wholly absurd. Your man aiming at the fullness of life will not yearn to take the light out of another man's day. The religion of Burns, like the religion of many another faulty but ever-striving man,

was not an organization, or a doctrine, or a sentiment, or a society, or a ceremonial, or a creed; it was a way of life. The essence of it was to live and let live, to establish genial relations wherever such establishment was possible. So to inflict death certainly could not have come into his calculations. As for dying, just then the Fates had other plans.

Still, in spite of all that anti-militarism, a little later there was Robert Burns, a volunteer in the Dumfries corps, a swarthy-faced man, awkward in handling his musket, with "ploughman stoop," says Cunningham, dressed in "white-kerseymere breeches and waistcoat, and round hat surmounted by a bearskin like the helmets of the Horse Guards."

But the awkward recruit made a patriotic song, properly defiant, and after that he might have made anti-patriotic toasts to his heart's content, had he been so inclined.

#### DOES HAUGHTY GAUL INVASION THREAT?

Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?

Then let the loons beware, Sir!

There's wooden walls upon our seas

And volunteers on shore, Sir!

The Nith shall run to Coriscon,

And Criffel sink in Solway,

Ere we permit a foreign foe

On British ground to rally!

O, let us not like snarling tykes,

In wrangling be divided,

Till, slap! come in an unco loun,

And wi' a rung decite it!

Be Britain still to Britain true,

Amang oursels united!

For never but by British hands

Maun British wrangs be righted!

The kettle o' the Kirk and State,  
Perhaps a clout may fail in 't;  
But Deil a foreign tinkler loon  
Shall ever ca' a nail in 't!  
Our fathers' blude the kettle bought,  
And wha wad dare to spoil it,  
By Heav'ns! the sacrilegious dog  
Shall fuel be to boil it!

The wretch that would a tyrant own,  
And the wretch, his true-sworn brother,  
Who would set the mob above the throne,  
May they be damn'd together!  
Who will not sing *God save the King*  
Shall hang as high's the steeple;  
But while we sing *God save the King*,  
We'll ne'er forget the people!

The pleasure-loving spirit of the man led him into a one-sided agreement with one George Thomson. Thomson wrote to Burns in September, 1792, saying that for some years he and a friend or two had been collecting "national melodies" for publication and had engaged Pleyel, "the most agreeable composer living," to set them to music, and asked Burns' help and coöperation. Immediately Burns was on fire with eagerness. He would be with them heart and soul, without contract and without price. He was glad and grateful to have the chance to share in what was being done, and confound anyone who would be otherwise, runs the spirit of the letter.

As the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have, strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm. Only, don't hurry me: "Deil tak' the hindmost", is by no means the *cri de*

*guerre* of my muse. Will you, as I am inferior to none of you in enthusiastic attachment to the poetry and music of old Caledonia, and, since you request it, have cheerfully promised my mite of assistance—will you let me have a list of your airs, and the first line of the printed verses you intend for them, that I may have an opportunity of suggesting any alteration that may occur to me? You know 'tis in the way of my trade; still leaving you, gentlemen, the undoubted rights of publishers, to approve or reject, at your pleasure, for your own publication. Apropos! if you are for English verses, there is, on my part, an end of the matter. Whether in the simplicity of the ballad, or the pathos of the song, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue. English verses, particularly the works of Scotsmen, that have merit, are certainly very eligible. "Tweedside"; "Ah! the poor shepherd's mournful fate!" "Ah! Chloris, could I now but sit," &c., you cannot mend; but such insipid stuff as "To Fanny fair could I impart," &c., usually set to "The Mill, Mill O," is a disgrace to the collection in which it has already appeared, and would doubly disgrace a collection that will have the very superior merit of yours. But more of this in the further prosecution of the business, if I am called on for my strictures and amendments—I say, amendments; for I will not alter except where I myself at least think that I amend.

As to any remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c., would be downright prostitution of soul! A proof of each of the songs that I compose or amend, I shall receive as a favor. In the rustic phrase of the season, "Gude speed the wark!"

. . . . .

R. Burns.



P. S. I have some particular reason for wishing my interference to be known as little as possible.

In all, Burns wrote fifty-six long letters to Thomson, went over acres of manuscript, examined many dozen tunes, suggested improvements, polished up rough ballads, asked in some cases: Who shall rise up and say, "Go to, I will make a better?" He says, in fine simplicity, "Don't let it enter into your head that you are under any necessity of taking my verses. I have long ago made up my mind as to my own reputation . . . and have nothing to be pleased or offended at in your adoption or rejection of my verses. Though you should reject one-half of what I give you, I shall be pleased with your adopting the other half, and shall continue to serve you with the same assiduity." It takes a great poet to write that way; your minor poet would be apt to sulk all round the zodiac at a rejection. But Burns goes on and on, his heart in the game; goes on talking sensibly about tunes as that such a song might not "suit the light-horse gallop of the air as well as this random clink"; accepting suggested improvements on a song or two of his own; making light of his own efforts, artist-like, to the point of giving away "John Anderson My Jo"; saying, and meaning it, "my vanity is flattered when you give my songs a place in your elegant and superb work, but to be a service to the work is my first wish." Wisely he warns Pleyel against altering the accent in the original Scots airs, for it is well to "let our national airs preserve their native features. They are, I own, frequently wild, and irreducible to the modern rule; but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect." There Burns touched on folk-music and the necessity for its preservation if for no other reason than the intrinsic



value of its vividness. He insisted upon the value of folk-music as growing out of what might be called group-emotion. "Have you ever, my dear sir," he asks Thomson, "felt your bosom ready to burst with indignation on reading of those mightly villains who divide kingdom against kingdom, desolate provinces, and lay nations waste, out of wantonness of ambition, or often from still more ignoble passions? In a mood of this kind today I recollected the air of Logan Water, and it occurred to me that its querulous melody probably had its origin from the plaintive indignation of some swelling, suffering heart, fired at the tyrannic strides of some public destroyer; and overwhelmed with private distress, the consequence of a country's ruin." (Then follows the tune, and many of the letters from Burns to Thomson carry the music notation.) In his reply, Thomson says: "I cannot express how much I am obliged to you for the exquisite new songs you are sending me; but thanks, my friend, are a poor return for what you have done; as I will be benefited by the publication, you must suffer me to inclose a small mark of my gratitude, and to repeat it afterwards when I find it convenient. . . . Do not return me, for, by Heaven, if you do, our correspondence is at an end; and though this would be no loss to you, it would mar the publication, which, under your auspices, cannot fail to be respectable and interesting. . . ." (A five-pound note accompanied the letter.)

So you get an idea of the Burns-Thomson correspondence with Burns doing the lion's share of the editing of a massive piece of work, very severely practical, always refreshing in his lucidity when it comes to writing about music, yet, to use his own words, "with-

out pretensions to musical art . . . untaught and untutored."

A most amazing passage appears in one of the letters, and it runs, "I have forgot the cantata you allude to, as I kept no copy, and indeed did not know of its existence; however, I remember that no one of the songs pleased myself except the last, something about 'Courts for cowards were erected, Churches built to please the priest.' " And there you have Burns the free-handed, the genial giver of his light, the flinger-away of god-given treasures confessing to having thought so lightly of his cantata "The Jolly Beggars," made when he was twenty-two, that he deliberately thrust it out of mind and gave the manuscript away, he did not know to whom. He thought nothing of a composition that held the brilliance of a Hogarth picture, that had the fire of Carlyle in that famous passage about the battering at the Bastille gate, that had the eager vivacity of Charles Dickens in a Pickwick scene. For it is a composition characterized by the greatest breadth of treatment and by a masterly delineation of character. A generation is fortunate that produces a piece of work with such vividness and fidelity. To read the cantata is to experience a shock almost as though a white-hot needle had touched a nerve. It is a genuine enlargement of experience. You open the door of Poosie Nancie's to find your face stung with the heat of the unventilated room, to catch your breath because of the odor of unwashed bodies, of stale beer, of foul rags, of dogs, of roadway filth brought into a close place. Your ears are saluted by an astonishing clamor of laughter, cursing, broken song, the shrill voices of children, the crackling of a huge fire, the high-pitched laugh of women. It is a picture that is magnificent with

the sanctity of truth, a perfect interpretation of a certain phase of life. It is a picture of mankind driven to a point of utter fearlessness of criticism, men and women defiant of established law, mocking authority, scornful of shibboleths, of morality, of dogmas. It is a picture of wretched humanity driven by its masters, driven by circumstances, driven by a thousand unrecognized forces to a corner where the weak become a terror to the strong. These beggars, and thieves, and war-broken soldiers, and loose women; this fiddler, and this tinker, and this outlaw's morte; these most courageous drinkers, and fornicators, and robbers, have turned tragedy to comedy and can regard with derision the fret and fever of life. Fiercely rebellious, they laugh at denunciations and censures. The tragedy of unfulfilled aims, the quest for admiration or praise, affection and sympathy, even cleanliness and order and comfort have been forgotten by them. Everything is stripped away with nothing left but animal appetite, except—and there is the great thing—except song. They live in corruption and in evil odor worse than beasts, but they sing. And by that one, slim shred of song they climb to happiness.

In song they become finely self-revealing. The battered soldier who fought under Wolfe,—he is minus an arm and a leg,—makes no pathetic appeal for sympathy because he fought his country's wars. He belongs to the old adventurous school. His trade was the sword, and war for him filled full the channel of life. His only regret is that he cannot be called to a new war, the old rascal.

And now, tho' I must beg with a wooden arm  
and leg

And many a tatter'd rag hanging over my bum,

I am happy with my wallet, my bottle and my  
callet (woman)

As when I us'd in scarlet to follow a drum.

What tho' with hoary locks I must stand the  
winter shocks,

Beneath the woods and rocks often times for a  
home?

When the tother bag I sell, and the tother bottle  
tell.

I could meet a troop of Hell at the sound of a  
drum.

So the house is set on a roar and in the middle of the noise the "martial chuck," or camp-follower, stepped forward to tell her tale about how she would change lovers on slight provocation, and of her jealous appreciation of her soldier laddie. So it goes, all very tremendous in its way, with drinking and shouting and rough love-making; with the peripatetic clown letting it be known that he is not such a fool as he allows people to think he is; with the girl who had "hooked" many a purse bewailing her Highland outlaw lover who had been hanged on the gallows; with an intermezzo of quarrel about a girl between the fiddler and the tinker until

. . . poor Tweedle-Dee

Upon his hunkers bended, (hams)

An' prayed for grace wi' rueful face,

An sae the quarrel ended.

So presently they come to an end with their rogues' chorus, firing a volley into entrenched authority, magnificently lawless and defiant of every code of morals, nothing sacred and nothing profane for them. I repeat, to read the poem is an enlargement of experience. You see a new side of life and you wonder, and, wondering at such

a world, for you feel it to be true, end by saying it is Allah's business!

Now come the closing months about which a tremendous deal of solemn nonsense has been written and said, while an atmosphere heavy with disapproval somehow has been conjured about things. You may read tales that stand out clear and almost permanent in your recollection, but, refusing to take them on authority and going in for independent verification, you discover that a little trifling carelessness here, and a little malignity there, idolatry in this place and iconoclasm in that, and a little prejudice somewhere else, have resulted in a medley of wrongness. There is a story that "a dreadful burst of potential sorrow issued from Burns' breast" on his death bed, so that he passed beautifully from bitterness to peace, and the tale was accepted as indicating something refined and noble in the poet. There is a story telling of an affair at Woodley Park when the poet was "guilty of an act of extreme rudeness" to the accomplished hostess, told too with that dangerous reticence which makes the affair look very black indeed, leaving the imagination wondering whether he flung the dinner in his hostess's face, or perhaps tried to emulate the heroes engaged in that Sabine affair, or merely said things derogatory about the cooking, then sat silent in a mood of tragic preoccupation with his own thoughts; but when I first read the hint, I suspected Burns of a burst of strange gaiety, as leaping to the seat of his chair and singing one of his bawdy songs in sudden ebullition of enthusiasm. Such a veiled hint might mean anything from attempt of murder and suicide to holding a private and amusing conversation with the butler. Then there



is the famous tale that might be entitled "Derision, Disgrace and Loss of Caste," telling how David McCulloch "was seldom more grieved than when, riding into Dumfries one fine summer's evening, to attend a county ball, he saw Burns, walking alone on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite side was gay with successive groups of ladies and gentlemen, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom seemed willing to recognize the poet." That has been transmuted somehow to a situation where Robert Burns goes about in sorrowful isolation an avoided man, a subject of criticism as one given to something like the orgies of savages, a goat divided from the properly disdainful sheep; and those sheep (to mix metaphors pleasantly), pearls of truth in settings of beauty most unapproachable. Theirs, true culture; Burns, vulgarity incarnate. Theirs, dignity and self-control; Burns, all selfish folly. Theirs, the larger existence; Burns, a melancholy failure. They with life attuned to a finer key; Burns hopelessly in the mire. Such is the pictured situation that some would seem to try to conjure up, and the world has been expected to take it seriously and be solemn about it.

Take that last incident; and, accepting things at their face value, what have you? Getting down to bare bones, on one side of the street you have a party of young people going to a ball, and, as they are closely grouped, it must be evident that the ball-room is near at hand. They would be light-hearted, full of merriment, walking two and two or four and four, all with a common interest, all full of emotional fervor quite foreign to literature or its lights. Robert Burns, in no very robust health, perhaps in a mood for lonely visions and perhaps



on his way to his favorite walk, at any rate in the sharp decline of fading life, chances to turn into the same street. Now with things as they were, what would he or any man of good sense do but take the other and quieter side of the street? Would David McCulloch have the poet on the other side, battering and bumping the crowd on the narrow pavement? Would he have him elbowing his way through that cheerful company bent on mirth and movement? Had Burns deliberately made a detour in search of quiet, then he would possibly have had a worse picture with Burns slinking down back streets and alleys to avoid debt collectors, or to be out of sight of those people with high standards and sensitive conscience. Or did David McCulloch expect to see Burns standing to be admired, making desperate attempts to court notice as telling people that he was indeed Robert Burns, or trying to evoke quiet tears from bright eyes as he recited some touching poem? In plain common sense, what occurred was what should have occurred, and it is silly idolatry that would make a pathetic scene of it. Burns took the quiet side of the street and avoided the crowd exactly as you or I or any sensible man would have done. He went about his business and the crowd going to the ball-room went its way, so there was order as it should have been. So much for what Shairp called an "affecting incident." It seems to me a simple ordinary one out of which sentimentalists have built up a melancholy edifice.

As for the Woodley Park affair, on examination it turns out to be a comparatively mild piece of work. At a dinner, after the women had left the table, the men passed the bottle in a lively fashion. Presently someone suggested a rush on the drawing-room by way of making things exciting, and Robert Burns caught the hostess,

Mrs. Walter Riddel, and kissed her. The story says that her resentment was tremendous. Doubtless Burns could be a bore and somewhat of a ruffian on occasion. But the insult in this case seems to be a slight one, and that Mrs. Riddel fell into dramatic pose because of it is not easy of credence. I would rather believe that the estrangement that followed came about because, angry at this and that said by Mrs. Riddel, Burns pinned this to Mrs. Riddel's carriage door:

If you rattle along like your mistress's tongue,  
Your speed will outrival your dart;  
But a fly for your load,  
You'll break down on the road.  
If your stuff be as rotten's her heart.

That, to any woman, would be more unforgivable than a kiss.

Burns was drinking a good deal about the end of 1795, perhaps drinking had become a habit instead of a pleasure, therefore dangerous to him. At any rate, according to report, he sometimes emphasized the truth with a bludgeon instead of a rapier, as it would seem that the finer edge was often gone from his judgment. Yet the fire and personality of the man, his silver tongue and inspiring presence made him a welcome guest at the inn as well as in private houses. Sometimes a damnable perversity got hold of him and he avoided the company of society women in pointed way, as when, being invited to dinner, he chose to eat with the housekeeper in the kitchen, somewhat like Kipps perhaps, then, when the women upstairs had retired to the drawing-room, Master Burns joined the men and played a good hand with bottle and glass. Perhaps he was courageous enough to do what many men would like to do. One remembers how

Herbert Spencer would stuff his ears with cotton wool so that he could not hear the chatter of women who tried to make conversation. It takes considerable self-control, on occasion, to sit at a table during some organized disappointment like a good-natured, long-enduring bear, but to regret the amenities certainly indicates loss of courage and endurance and amiability. Burns being Burns, could endure much, but he could not endure insincerity and pretense. He always had the youth's healthy instinct for verity. In manhood his nature perhaps reached back to the youth he had missed, at the age of thirty-six he was full of that carelessness and recklessness that belongs to the age of fourteen, an age when the suppression of instinct is torture, when ritual is meaningless, when conformity strangles. Judged before the assizes of fashionable etiquette for his lapse, he would have been found guilty; judged by those he knew in boyhood and his peasant associates he would have been acquitted.

A good deal of nonsense has been talked and written about "reversion to type" in the case of Burns, by which has been meant that he was, and always must have been, unfitted for the society of leisured and cultured men of the Cowper and Walpole type, finely polished and full of pleasant conventionalities and subtle compromises. Whether that is true or not must remain matter for discussion, as it must also remain matter for discussion whether the cultured type is likely to endure longer than the peasant type, and, therefore best and fittest for survival. But some meed of common sense must be brought to bear upon the speculation as upon everything else, and, assuming the cultivation of the graces to be something highly desirable, the charge so lightly made against

Robert Burns must lack force because he died at an age when the sap runs strongly. Your perfect gentleman is the result of more than half a life-time of training, and when we conjure up a vision of the type, we invariably see those who have passed the hey-day of youth, when clean-living is the result of experience rather than of thought, when they no longer quiver with hot desire, when unselfishness has revealed itself as a most excellent policy, when considerateness has come as the result of a conviction. A Robert Burns arrived at the age of sixty easily might have changed into that sort of stoic which can absorb all kinds of indignities and offenses and inhumanities without outward resentment, and so, outwardly he would appear a very admirable example of lofty reverence. Dignity and age go well together, dignity and youth are ridiculous. A young man possessed of what Matthew Arnold called "the old-fashioned, laborious, eternally needful moral deliverance" would go perilously close to having the appearance of a prig. As to all that satirical resentment launched against established things, it should be easy to remember that with the passing of the years even Burns and Shelley, like the majority of men, might have learned to be heretical in private, retaining their anarchisms for after-dinner discussion, and regarding outspokenness as blatancy. As for other matters, many a silver-haired old gentleman of the Wordsworth type, properly mellowed, walking in the sunset of life, may conceal a gay wantonness under a mask of intense seriousness. In all of which there is food for thought.

Like Faust, Burns sought what he found lacking in one circle in Auerbach's Cellar, and if after all he found only boisterousness then he could supply the wit. The

Cellar in the case was the Globe Inn where he sat, one January night, drinking in the company of a jolly crowd while waiting, like his own Tam o' Shanter, for the storm to blow over. But the snow continued to fall, so Burns went out of the well-lighted and warmed room into the blethering wind, staggered on his way for a little distance, found the going hopeless, then discovering a quiet place in the lee of some building sat awhile to rest and to get his breath, nodded, checked himself into partial wakefulness, drooped again and fell asleep. The shock of that three hours in the snow was severe. It brought all kinds of complications, "flying gout" and rheumatic fever, and the "results of a misspent youth," as someone puts it.

There is very little worth recording from the time of that unlucky carouse to the time of his death, which took place July 21st, 1796. That last was a miserable half-year, with Burns trying sea-air and sea-bathing to no effect, with creditors pressing him, with his income so dwindled that we find him forced to write to a friend for the loan of a guinea, and, nine days before his death making a plea to the music publisher, Thomson.

After all my boasted independence, curst Necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel scoundrel of a Haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return post. Forgive me this earnestness; but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously; for upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds' worth of the neatest song-genius you have seen. I tried my hand on "Rothiemurchie" this morning. The measure is so difficult, that it is



impossible to infuse much genius into the lines: they are on the other side. Forgive, forgive me! Yours,

R. Burns.

Obviously, while it is all very distressing, it will not do to vituperate against "the cruel scoundrel of a Haberdasher," who doubtless had troubles of his own, though the pressure must have been tremendous on the Burns family, and especially upon Jean who was again travelling with child. Indeed, a son was born to her ten days after the poet's death. And I, for one, find a grain of comfort in the fact that the haberdasher wrote the letter, because, instead of Burns' last words being in the form of "a dreadful burst of penitential sorrow," they were, according to his eldest son, a hearty damning of the fellow who had burst into a sick room to bring such a letter. Such a man as Burns would die damning rather than whining. Such a one anticipating examination in a Celestial City would be conjuring up arguments to be presented with extraordinary vividness. I like to imagine the man admitting the black chasm of his guilt and putting the matter in a pungent, pithy epigram for God's amusement. To do that would be like Robert Burns.

THE END

## APPENDIX I

### Books About Robert Burns

You will find an excellent book in Everyman's Library, "The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns," with an introduction by James Douglas. But if you care to go further into the subject, there are the following:

CHAMBERS, ROBERT—"Life and Works of Robert Burns," edited by; (Edinburgh, 4 vols., 1851-1852; library edition, 1856-1857; new edition revised by William Wallace, 1896).

CROMEK, R. H.—"Reliques of Robert Burns," (London, 1808).

CUNNINGHAM, ALLAN—"The Works of Robert Burns," with his life by, (8 vols., London, 1834). Many additions and much biographical matter.

CURRIE, DR.—anonymous editor of the "Works of Robert Burns," with an account of his Life, and a criticism of his Writings; (Liverpool, 1800). A second and amended edition appeared in 1801 and was followed by others, but Currie's text is neither accurate nor complete.

DOUGLAS, W. SCOTT—(The Kilmarnock edition, 1876, and the Library edition, 1877, 1879).

GILFILLAN, GEORGE—edition (2 vols., 1864).

GUNNYON, WILLIAM—"Robert Burns' Life," in an edition by Nimmic (1866).

HENLEY, W. E. and T. F. HENDERSON—A critical edition of the "Poetry of Robert Burns" which may be regarded as definitive, and is provided with full notes and warrant readings (4 vols. Edinburgh, 1896-1897; reprinted 1901) and is generally known as the "Centenary Burns." In vol. iii the extent of Burns' indebtedness to Scottish folk-song and his methods of adaptation are minutely discussed; vol. iv contains an essay on "Robert Burns' Life, Genius, Achievement," by W. E. Henley.

HOGG, JAMES and WILLIAM MOTHERWELL—"The Works of Robert Burns" (5 vols., 1834-1836, Glasgow and Edinburgh). Hogg wrote the life of Burns. Motherwell made the notes and attempted to trace the source of Burns' poetry.

- IRVING, DAVID—"Lives of the Scottish Poets" contains a life of Burns in vol. ii.
- LANG, ANDREW—edition assisted by W. A. Craigie (London, 1896).
- LOCKHART, GIBSON—"Life of Burns" (Edinburgh, 1828).
- LOCKHART, GIBSON—The life also appeared in 1828 in vol. xxiii of "Constables Miscellany" and was also reprinted separately.
- PAUL, HAMILTON—A life by this author was prefixed to his poems and songs in 1819.
- ROSSETTI, W. M.—His life appeared in an edition by Moxon (1871).
- SHAIRP, J. CAMPBELL—"Life of Burns" for the "English Men of Letters" series in 1879.
- SMITH, ALEXANDER—Wrote life for the "Globe" edition (vol. i); and the "Cambridge" edition (Boston, 1897). Also (Golden Treasury Series, London, 2 vols., 1865).
- WADDELL, P. HATELY—edition (Glasgow, 1867).
- WALKER, JOSIAH—A life was prefixed to a collection of his poems in 1811 and separately printed.

## ESSAYS ON BURNS

- ANGELLIER, AUGUSTE—(Robert Burns. *La vie et les oeuvres*, 2 vols., Paris, 1893).
- CARLYLE, THOMAS—(Edinburgh Review, December, 1828).
- NICHOL, JOHN—(W. Scott Douglas's edition of Burns).
- ROBERTSON, J. LOGIE—(in "In Scottish Fields," Edin., 1890, and "Furth in Field," Edin., 1894).
- ROSEBERY, LORD—(Robert Burns. Two addresses in Edinburgh, 1896).
- STEVENSON, R. L.—(Familiar studies of men and books).

The publication of Cromeek's *Reliques* in 1808 produced a review by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* for Jan. 1809, and by Scott in the *Quarterly Review* for Feb. 1809.

## APPENDIX II

### Religious and Theological Writings Which Influenced Burns

A Manual of Religious Belief, in a Dialogue between Father and Son, compiled by William Burnes, farmer at Mount Oliphant, Ayrshire, and transcribed, with grammatical corrections, by John Murdoch, teacher.

*Son.* Dear father, you have often told me, while you were initiating me into the Christian Religion, that you stood bound for me, to give me a Christian education, and recommended a religious life to me. I would, therefore, if you please, ask you a few questions, that may tend to confirm my faith, and clear its evidences to me.

*Father.* My dear child, with gladness I will resolve to you (so far as I am able) any question you shall ask; only with this caution, that you will believe my answers, if they are founded in the Word of God.

*Question.* How shall I evidence to myself that there is a God?

*Answer.* By the works of creation: for nothing can make itself; and this fabrick of nature demonstrates its Creator to be possessed of all possible perfection, and for that cause we owe all that we have to Him.

*Question.* If God be possessed of all possible perfection, ought not we then to love Him, as well as to fear and serve Him?

*Answer.* Yes; we ought to serve Him out of love, for His perfections give us delightful prospects of His favour and friendship, for if we serve Him out of love, we will endeavor to be like Him, and God will love His own image, and if God love us, He will rejoice over us to do us good.

*Question.* Then one would think this were sufficient to

determine all men to love God; but how shall we account for so much wickedness in the world?

*Answer.* God's Revealed Word teaches us that our first parents brake His covenant, and deprived us of the influences of His Grace that were to be expected in that state, and introduced Sin into the world; and the Devil, that great enemy of God and man, laying hold on this instrument, his kingdom has made great progress in the world.

*Question.* But has God left His own rational offspring thus, to the tyranny of His and their enemy?

*Answer.* No; for God has addressed His rational creatures, by telling them in His Revealed Word, that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the Serpent, or Devil, or in time destroy His kingdom; and in the meantime, every one oppressed by the tyranny of the Devil should, through the promised seed, by faith in Him, and humble supplication, and a strenuous use of their own faculties, receive such measures of Grace, in and through this method of God's conveyance, as should make them able to overcome.

*Question.* But by what shall I know that this is a revelation of God, and not a cunningly devised fable?

*Answer.* A revelation of God must have these four marks: (1) It must be worthy of God to reveal; (2) It must answer all the necessities of human nature; (3) It must be sufficiently attested by miracles; and (4) It is known by prophecies and their fulfillment. That it is worthy of God it is plain, by its addressing itself to the reason of men, and plainly laying before them the dangers to which they are liable, with motives and arguments to persuade them to their duty, and promising such rewards as are fitted to promote the happiness of a rational soul. Secondly, it provides for the guilt of human nature, making an atonement by a mediator; and for its weakness, by promising the assistance of God's Spirit; and for its happiness, by promising a composure of mind, by the regulation of its faculties, and reducing the appetites and passions of the body unto the subjection of reason, enlightened by the Word of God, and by a resurrection of the body, and a glorification of both soul and body in heaven, and that to last through an eternity. Thirdly, as a miracle is a contra-



diction of the known laws of Nature, demonstrating that the worker has the power of Nature in his hands, and, consequently, must be God, or sent by His commission and authority from Him to do such and such things. That this is the case in our Scriptures is evident both by the prophets, under the Old, and our Saviour, under the New Testament. Whenever it served for the glory of God, or for the confirmation of their commissions, all Nature was obedient to them; the elements were at their command, also, the sun and moon, yea, Life and Death. Fourthly, that prophecies were fulfilled at the distance of many hundreds of years, is evident by comparing the following texts of Scripture: Gen. xlix. 10, 11; Matth. xxi. 5; Isa. vii. 14; Matth. i. 22, 23; Luke i. 34; Isa. xl. 1; Matth. iii. 3; Mark i. 3; Luke iii. 4; John i. 23; Isa. xlii. 1, 2, 3, 4. A description of the character of Messiah in the Old Testament Scriptures is fulfilled in all the Evangelists. In Isa. i. 5, His sufferings are prophesied, and exactly fulfilled in the New Testament, Matth. xxvi. 67, and xxvii. 26; and many others, as that Abraham's seed should be strangers in a strange land four hundred years, and being brought to Canaan, and its accomplishment in the days of Joseph, Moses, and Joshua.

*Question.* Seeing that the Scriptures are proven to be a revelation of God to His creatures, am not I indispensably bound to believe and obey them?

*Answer.* Yes.

*Question.* Am I equally bound to obey all the laws delivered to Moses upon Mount Sinai?

*Answer.* No; the laws delivered to Moses are of three kinds: first, ages and nations; secondly, the law of sacrifices and ordinances were only ordinances in which were couched types and shadows of things to come, and when that dispensation was at an end, this law ended with them, for Christ is the end of the law for Righteousness; thirdly, laws that respected the Jewish commonwealth can neither be binding on us, who are not of that commonwealth, nor on the Jews, because their commonwealth is at an end.

*Question.* If the Moral Law be of indispensable obligation, I become bound to perfect and perpetual obedience, of

which I am incapable, and on that account cannot hope to be justified and accepted with God?

*Answer.* The Moral Law, as a rule of life, must be of indispensable obligation, but it is the glory of the Christian religion, that if we be upright in our endeavors to follow it, and sincere in our repentance, upon our failing or short-coming, we shall be accepted according to what we have, and shall increase in our strength, by the assistance of the Spirit of God co-operating with our honest endeavors.

*Question.* Seeing the assistance of the Spirit of God is absolutely necessary for salvation, hath not God clearly revealed by what means we may obtain this great blessing?

*Answer.* Yes: the Scriptures tell us that the Spirit of God is the purchase of God's mediatorial office: and through faith in Him, our humble prayers to God through Christ, we shall receive such measures thereof as shall answer all our wants.

*Question.* What do you understand by faith?

*Answer.* Faith is a firm persuasion of the Divine mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that He is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, and complete redemption; or as he is represented to us under the notion of a root, and we the branches, deriving all from Him; or as the head, and we the members of His body; intimating to us that this is the way or channel through which God conveys His blessings to us, and we are not to expect them but in God's own way. It is therefore a matter of consequence to us, and therefore we ought with diligence to search the Scriptures, and the extent of His commission, or what they declare Him to be, and to receive Him accordingly, and to acquiesce in God's plan of our salvation.

*Question.* By what shall I know that Jesus Christ is really the person that was prophesied of in the Old Testament; or that He was the seed of woman that was to destroy the Kingdom of Sin?

*Answer.* Besides the Scriptures forecited, which fully prove him to be that blessed person, Christ did many miracles: He healed the sicq, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, raised the dead, and fed thousands with a few loaves, &c. He foretold His own death and resurrection, and the

wonderful progress of His religion, in spite of all the power of the Roman Empire—and that by means of His disciples, a few poor illiterate fishermen.

*Question.* You speak of repentance as absolutely necessary to salvation—I would know what you mean by repentance?

*Answer.* I not only mean a sorrowing for sin, but a labouring to see the malignant nature of it; as setting nature at variance with herself, by placing the animal part before the rational, and thereby putting ourselves on a level with the brute beasts, the consequence of which will be an intestine war in the human frame, until the rational part be entirely weakened, which is spiritual death, which in the nature of the thing renders us unfit for the society of God's spiritual kingdom, and to see the beauty of holiness. On the contrary, setting the rational part above the animal, though it promote a war in the human frame, every conflict and victory affords us grateful reflection, and tends to compose the mind more and more, not to utter destruction of the animal part, but to the real and true enjoyment on them, by placing Nature in the order that its Creator designed it, which in the natural consequences of the thing promotes Spiritual Life, and renders us more and more fit for Christ's spiritual kingdom; and not only so, but gives to animal life pleasure and joy, that we never could have had without it.

*Question.* I should be glad to hear you at large upon religion giving pleasure to animal life; for it is represented as taking up our cross and following Christ?

*Answer.* Our Lord honestly told His disciples of their danger, and what they were to expect by being His followers, that the world would hate them, and for this reason, because they were not of the world, even as he also was not of the world; but He gives them sufficient comfort, showing that He had overcome the world: as if He had said, you must arm yourselves with a resolution to fight, for if you be resolved to be my disciples, you expose the world, by setting their folly in its true light, and therefore every one who is not brought over by your example, will hate and oppose you as it hath Me. But as it hath had no advantage against Me, and I have overcome it, if you continue the conflict, you, by My strength,

shall overcome likewise; so that this declaration of our Lord cannot damp the pleasures of life when rightly considered, but rather enlarges them. The same revelation tells us, that the religious life hath the promise of the life that now is, and that which is to come; and not only by the well-regulated mind described in my last answer, as tending to give pleasure and quiet, but by a firm trust in the providence of God, and by the help of an honest calling, industriously pursued, we shall receive such a portion of the comfortable things of this life as shall be fittest for promoting our eternal interest, and that under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness; and that we shall overcome all our difficulties by being under the protection of infinite power. These considerations cannot fail to give relish to all the pleasures of life. Besides, the very nature of the thing giving pleasure to a mind so regular as I have already described, it must exalt the mind above those irregular passions that jar, and are contrary one to another, and distract the mind by contrary pursuits, which is described by the Apostle with more strength in his Epistle to the Romans (chap. i, from verse 26 to the end) than any words I am capable of framing; especially if we take our Lord's parable of the tares in the field as an improvement of these doctrines, as it is in Matth. xiii., from the 37th to the 44th verse; and Rev. xx., from verse 11 to the end. If these Scriptures, seriously considered, can suffer any man to be easy, judge ye, and they will remain truth, whether believed or not. Whereas, on a mind regular and having the animal part under subjection to the rational, in the very nature of the thing gives uniformity of pursuits. The desires (rectified by the word of God, must give clearness of judgment, soundness of mind, regular affections, whence will flow peace of conscience, good hope, through grace, that all our interests are under the care of our Heavenly Father. This gives a relish to animal life itself, this joy that no man intermeddeth with, and which is peculiar to a Christian or holy life; and its comforts and blessings the whole Scripture is a comment upon, especially our Lord's Sermon upon the Mount, Matth. v. 1-13, and its progress in the parable of the Sower in the xiii-th of Matthew.

### APPENDIX III

## Gavin Hamilton and the Mauchline Kirk-Session

The parochial persecution of Gavin Hamilton did not terminate with the events which provoked "Holy Willie's Prayer." On the 27th October (1785), the Session resolved not to erase the minutes of which he had complained, "because he continues to give more and more offence by neglect of public ordinances, and that in disobedience to the recommendation of the reverend presbytery."

On the 2d of August 1787, the Session is informed that Gavin Hamilton, on the last Lord's Day, caused his servant, James Brayan, to dig some potatoes in his garden. By a letter of the 8th September, Mr. Hamilton makes the following explanation:—"I was walking with my children in the forenoon in the garden, when some of them petitioned for a few new potatoes, having got none that season. I considered the request as so very reasonable, particularly from those who made it, that I did not scruple to listen to their demands; nor had I an idea that raising a few potatoes in a private garden would have given offence to any person, more than pulling any garden stuff."

In their answer, the Session express doubt of the children having had none that season, "being informed that there were new potatoes in his house some days before that Sabbath, for proving whereof, if necessary, witnesses are named." Some time after, they find that two and a half rows of potatoes, each row ten or eleven feet long, were dug, and that the child was employed to gather them; they therefore pass sentence, ordering Mr. Hamilton to appear and answer, not for the sin of Sabbath-breaking, but "for the guilt of contumacy." The latter was pressed before the Presbytery of Ayr, and dismissed, on technical grounds. Not to be beaten, Mr.



Auld commenced *de novo*, summoned Mr. Hamilton to answer, not merely for the potato-digging, but also for the old offence of neglecting public ordinances and induced the Session to sentence him to profess repentance, promise amendment, and submit to a rebuke from the chair. This sentence also the Presbytery reversed, merely recommending Mr. Hamilton, in regard to potato-digging, "To be more careful in not giving offence on the Lord's Day." This ended the matter so far as the principal delinquent was concerned; but on the 13th January 1788, James Brayan stood a rebuke for having dug the potatoes. Further Mr. Auld demanded "reparation" from Mr. Robert Aiken (Mr. Hamilton's agent in the various processes before the Presbytery), for his hard speeches, and ultimately, through the intermediation of a committee of presbytery, got it in the shape of an admission that "in the heat of his argument for a client he may have expressed himself improperly, and that he is sorry for any umbrage or offence Mr. Auld may have taken at this, as he never meant to injure him."



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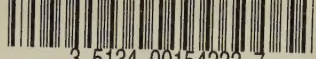






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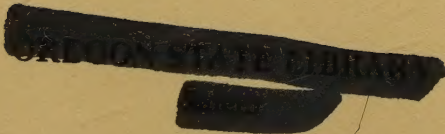

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